

MAE LOU'S PROJECT - AWAKENING THE PROPHETIC VOICE OF THE
FEMALE SUFFERING THROUGH SHARED NARRATIVES

By

Georgia B. Alexander

Sinclair Community College, Dayton, OH, 1978
Associate: Southwestern College of Business, Dayton, OH, 1991
MDIV, United Theological Seminary, 2010

Mentors

Robert C. Walker D.Min
Kenneth Cummings, D.Min

Faculty Consultant
F. Rachel Magdalene, Ph.D

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

DAYTON, OHIO

2015

**United Theological Seminary
Dayton, Ohio**

**Faculty Approval Page
Doctor of Ministry Final Project**

**MAE LOU'S PROJECT: GIVING VOICE TO THE PROPHETIC
FEMALE SUFFERING IN SILENCE
VIA SHARED NARRATIVES**

by

Georgia Bonner Alexander

United Theological Seminary, 2015

Mentors

Robert Walker, D. Min.

Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr., D. Min.

Date: _____

Approved:

Faculty Mentors:

_____ **Associate Dean of Doctoral Studies**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER	
1. MINISTRY FOCUS	5
2. THE STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY PROJECT	47
3. THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	60
4. METHODOLOGY	141
5. FIELD EXPERIENCE.....	150
6. REFLECTION, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	163
APPENDIX	
A. CENSUS DATA	169
B. PRE TEST.....	171
C. POST TEST	173
D. SEMINAR.....	175
BIBLIOGRAPHY	177

ABSTRACT

MAE LOU'S PROJECT: GIVING VOICE TO THE PROPHETIC FEMALE SUFFERING IN SILENCE VIA SHARED NARRATIVES

by

Georgia B. Alexander

United Theological Seminary, 2015

Mentors

Robert C. Walker, D.Min.

Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr. D.Min.

The Northwest Dayton community has little or no ministries which provide support for women who are challenged with life's struggles. This project is to create a safe and sacred environment which will allow women to share their stories and become empowered in who they are. This is a feasibility study that will meet for a six-week time period to evaluate the effectiveness of sharing stories. Storytelling is an effective tool for releasing one's innermost secrets when a sacred and secure environment is created. A mixed methodology will be used to collect data and draw inference from its effectiveness.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Praise, thanksgiving and glory to the wise God who kept me, brought me, ordered my steps and ordained my works through this whole process. “In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths,” so says the word of God. Had it not been for God, where would I be?

I want to express my profound appreciation for my mentors, Drs. Robert Walker and Kenneth Cummings, in addition to my faculty consultant, Dr. Rachel Magdalene, who labored with me, leading, guiding and extended their support and encouragement. I would be remiss if I failed to publicly document my sincere thanks and appreciation to the wives of my mentors, Mrs. Anita Cummings and Dr. Mary Walker, as they supported their husbands while they walked with me and shared their time with me.

I further extend my gratitude to my context associates, Myra Wilburn, who journeyed with me all the way, attending the study groups, critiquing my written work while offering prayers for my success; Edwina Blackwell Clark in particular, was helpful in reviewing my document, providing editorial expertise, which was helpful in providing clarity. Thanks to Minnie Bonner, my biological sister, who journeyed with me by lending an ear for long, late night telephone conversations; and to Carolyn McCain, Sa’ndra Lewis, Teresa Walker, Camilla Wynn, Melanie Marshall, Julia Capers, Carol Peters, and many others who attended the research sessions.

Many thanks to my professional associates: To Dr. Emma Justes, who journeyed with me and supported me from the second semester of my Masters of Divinity as my faculty advisor and Pastoral Care professor and even through my journey through my Doctor of Ministry. She encouraged me, gave special critique while advising me on

approach as well as recommending materials and resources. Dr. Justes, you nailed it with your publication, *Please Don't Tell*. I give thanks to Dr. Felicia LaBoy, who suggested and provided much of my research materials for the theological foundation in addition to Dr. Andrew Parks. Dr. Theresa Myadze, Director of Social Work at Wright State University, was a great help in assisting with creating the questionnaires. Dr. Robert Jones was right there from the very beginning of the research, donating food for some of the sessions and assisting me by referring women with whom he had previously worked. He was very helpful in helping in the preparation for the final defense.

Many thanks to Dr. Sarah Blair, Dr. Rychie Breidenstein, Brice Thomas, Darice Jackson, Laura Weber, Dr. Thomas Dozeman, Dr. Vivian Johnson, Joanne Dodge, Dr. Gerald Young, Dr. Leroy Cothran, Joanne Dodge and Dr. Pauline Puckett for sharing hours of library time and her final document.

To my oldest daughter, Racquel, for her close observation and recognizing that I was in state of despair and encouraging me with the words, "Mom, we need to go back to church." Thus, God's plan was set in motion. Last but not least, I give thanks to my husband, Raymond Alexander, who kept pushing me until I entered seminary and stood by me, staying awake with me late at night, while proofing my papers, and driving me through the mountains to all of my out-of-town peer sessions in Savannah. Georgia and Charleston, South Carolina.

Finally, the greatest focus group of all, *Prophetic Preaching and Praxis*, you are an awesome group.

To God be the glory for all He has done!

DEDICATION

In memory of Mary Lou Temple Bonner, my beloved mother and the source of inspiration and namesake for this project. Mae Lou (as we all affectionately call her), I did it with God by my side. Not only did I “graduate from school,” I achieved the highest academic level in Christian education. Beyond your greatest imagination and my wildest dream, the unknown “vision” kept tugging at me and here we are as I know you are right here with me. I love you and thank you; for each time I wanted to quit, I could sense you telling me to go ahead. I did it for you!

In memory of my father, Wright Bonner. I was very young when you left me, but your spirit never left my heart. Throughout my entire life, I never stopped missing you and wishing to see your face again. I have searched and searched for even a picture, but to no avail.

In memory of my oldest sister, Mary Dean Miller, who started this through challenging me theologically when she changed from Baptist to Pentecostal and taking half the family with you. Deep love for you, Sis.

In memory to Bill (William Merriweather), my mischievous brother, who kept me in trouble, causing me to get many whippings. But there remained a deep and profound love, and I cannot get over missing you.

INTRODUCTION

The seed for this project was planted in the fertile mind of a young black girl in an isolated area of rural Alabama on her great-grandfather's farm. She was just past the toddler stage, curious and beginning to understand the world around her. It was at this age that she was snatched from a fall into a fireplace roaring with fire. She learned firsthand about the terrible suffering of physical pain. With childish faith and innocence she took her pain and suffering in prayer for healing to a yet unknown source for healing. So often she had witnessed adults around her praying, and thus she learned the power of prayer to an Almighty God. She had often witnessed people praying. It did not take her long to understand that the source of the help came from a higher power which was later identified as the power of the Almighty God.

She was the fourth of eight children, four boys and four girls, and the first of two girls born to the union of her mother and father. Her parents separated before she turned two years of age. It was the summer of her sixth year of life that she unexpectedly lost her beloved father in death. This led to a grief process that lasted into her adult life. During seminary training she began to identify some of the sources of her grief, one of which was the loss of her father.

Throughout her childhood and early adulthood she often observed her mother silently crying and found it very disturbing. Through the years many attempts were made to find the reason behind the tears, but these attempts proved to be unsuccessful. The writer's mother made one demand of her: that she finish high school. On May 26, 1965,

she walked across the small stage of Pickens County Training School in Carrollton, Alabama, and received her high school diploma. This time she saw her mother shed tears of joy. Her mother died of an extended and debilitating illness in March of 1980 at the age of fifty-nine.

Through her ongoing quest to understand the “crying” problem that seemed to plague her mother’s life, she followed the urge to do a feasibility study of women in her contextual setting who appeared to be dealing with painful challenges similar to those of her mother. Fueled by this desire for further understanding, the researcher envisioned an environment of support where women who mirrored some of the despair she had witnessed in her mother during her childhood, would come together and share narratives.

An investigative technique was undertaken to prove the validity of bringing women together in a safe and sacred space for the purposes of sharing narratives which would provide support and healing for these women.

Background training and experience as a chaplain, as well as working as an administrative assistant at St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church, which is the contextual setting for this project, included regular encounters with a large number of women who seemed to be suffering in silence. As such, the researcher was provided with the opportunity for a deeper look into the lives of these women. It was often found that many of these women were eager to talk with someone about their issues and overall suffering.

Partnering with members of the local congregation, two support groups had been formed within the aforementioned context. The first group was made up of men and women of the congregation under the ministry of “Caring and Sharing.” After ten years of regular meetings and outreach ministry, this group became inactive because of lack of attendance. After discussion with another woman after bible study one night, the need for

a women's support group was entertained. In the fall of 2012, a support ministry was formed. Its purpose was to bring women together to share and discuss concerns with each other. These efforts served as the seeds for this project and written narrative.

The Introduction of this manuscript explicitly explains the project from inception to completion. Chapter One includes the spiritual journey which includes preparation and call to ministry, context for ministry, as well as graces and passion along with the heart for ministry. Spiritual connections between all of these entities led to the implementation of this project which is explained in the synergy section of this chapter.

Chapter Two examines the state of the art in this ministry model. This unit explores the relevant research studies on women and their silence amid life's hardship as well as the writer's knowledge and understanding of the literature reviewed on the subject of marginalized women and women faced with issues that only women can relate.

Chapter Three expounds on the theoretical foundations of the project. The biblical, historical and theological foundations encompass the academic and scholarly works studied in the areas of those women who are marginalized as well as those who have managed to overcome their obstacles and being set free from the demons that plague our society such as injustice, oppression, sexism, and classism. The word of God found in both the Old Testament and the New Testament and how this word supports the thesis will be addressed. This unit also explores a historical overview of women throughout the ages and how they dealt with the challenges in light of their historical/cultural context. The chapter continues with a theological view on the subject of women and how the Word of God applies to God's purpose for women and support of women from different cultural perspectives through the eyes of well-known theologians.

Chapter Four explains the methodology and design used for this project. The chapter further gives a synopsis of how the project was initiated and how it gave birth to a

final project. Chapter Five describes the field experience and gives an overview of what transpired during the implementation of the project. It gives an analysis of the pros and cons of the field experience. It will also note how the writer was challenged and had to overcome many obstacles, which further adds credence to the claim stated in the study. The reason behind the label "feasibility study" in the project proposal was shared indicating that it might not work. And as noted in the body of the thesis, it almost didn't for reasons stated. Chapter Six concludes the narrative with reflections, summaries, and conclusions of the project. The transformative results of the research project will be discussed as well as additional suggestions, strategies, and ideas for future modification.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

The author's spiritual journey began around the age of three or four when she encountered incidents in her young life that led her to pray. Belief in the Almighty God began to develop as she faced many challenges early in life that caused her to "pray" as she saw others pray. A keen sense of awareness of a super power was fostered in the heart and mind of the author. At age three or four, the writer fell into a full-burning fireplace of her great grandfather's house causing such painful burns over her body that she began to "pray" in her own childish way for God to heal the burns as she had often heard others ask the invisible God for special favors. She noticed that people called on this supernatural God when there was no other obvious hope.

The writer was born and raised in Carrollton, Alabama, a rural section of the northwestern area of that state in the county seat of Pickens County. From her earliest memory she experienced racial prejudice and other forms of social injustice. She was taught early that there were certain privileges that whites enjoyed which were not available for her. The reality of racism was reinforced by the legend of the image of a "The Face in the Window." The story behind the image engraved in the window is that a black man was hung in the upper level of the courthouse because he had committed the punishable crime of flirting with a white woman. Legend holds that as the chair was removed from under him and he died, lightning struck and the image was permanently

etched in the window. This event took place in the mid-nineteenth century, and repeated efforts to remove it have been exhausted. This image now serves as a tourist attraction.

Growing up in the midst of the Jim Crow era of the 50's and mid 60's, the writer became more and more aware of the negative effects of and the injustice of racism. In spite of childish innocence she had strong convictions that God did not intend for one human to oppress or mistreat another. However wrong it may have seemed, this was a way of life that was endured by all blacks of that time. Hosea 6:4 informs that people are destroyed because of lack of knowledge. Thus, the oppression and injustice were merely translated from the whites to black men who began to oppress their women, carrying it over into the church by the leaders of their respective churches. Black women's victimization is therefore multidimensional. Black women discriminate against each other on the basis of classism, skin tone, etc.

There is an old saying that "ignorance is bliss" which left to personal interpretation would mean that ignorance proved to rule in the favor of Zack Simon, great-grandfather of the writer. The white sharecropper was ignorant of the fact that Zack could read and do simple computations of arithmetic. Through what could be described as "impeccable" or maybe functional record keeping, Zack was able to prove that his labor of sharecropping over a period of years added up to the cost of the purchase of the land. Upon hearing the story of how their small plantation had been acquired, the writer felt her great-grandfather had been vindicated and poetic justice had been served. In fact, it was said that the sharecropper himself was not well-learned in book sense and was not smart enough to provide documents to successfully protest. Needless to say, it is a

favorite legend from the childhood of the writer. Social injustice is a deeply disturbing issue for the writer.

The writer is the fourth of eight children born to her mother. As previously mentioned, the parents were separated when she was very young. Her father died the summer she was five years old. The writer's grief lasted through adulthood at which point some resolution began to take place. None of her family was able to recognize this and the writer believes she still has bouts of grief associated with periods of depression, which were finally revealed in pastoral care classes in seminary and CPE training.

She faced bouts of intense grief and there was no one who understood her or even tried to talk to her during these painful times. Futile attempts to share with her mother or others only ended in more pain. She longed for someone who would understand and help her through these difficult times. Life was not easy with a mother who often seemed depressed and cried a lot. If there would be one word to describe the home life, it would be dysfunctional as she endured domestic violence and abuse. Her mother seemed to think herself inferior to others with a hung-head demeanor, especially white people. Even at that young age and into her teenage years, the writer was very angered to observe her mother's avoidance of eye contact with white people. The mystery surrounding the source of her tears continues to remain. Attempts to get her mother to share the "why" of her tears were to no avail.

Writer's Spiritual Life

The writer believed that education would be the key to gainful employment which would provide better living conditions for the household. She continued to seek the

presence of the God that everyone talked about that sustained her during times of disappointments. She remembers being angry a lot, and that if she had known about her father's illness or what caused him to die, she maybe could have been able to pray to God to keep him here with her.

Amid family situations and circumstances, she came to know God for herself and discovered that God does answer prayer. Talking to God about her unhappiness helped to build the writer's hope that things would get better. On clear nights she would fix her eyes on the farthest star and imagine that to be New York with the hope that she would soon go there to find work as many of her childhood friends did. She clung to that faith for it was faith that gave her hope that she would eventually be free of the pain of poverty and losing her father. Holding to her hope and faith she eventually relocated to Dayton where she found gainful employment which relieved some of the struggles of the poverty-stricken household. Her mother encouraged her to finish high school. The writer made a commitment to her mother and herself that she would graduate. She fulfilled this commitment being the first of her siblings to do so. She later found out the reason her mother placed such a value on education was that on the paternal side of her family (Temple), her first cousin was one of the Tuskegee Airmen (Alva Temple). Maybe it helped to instill a sense of self-worth.

There was little doubt that she and her siblings were loved by their mother. One summer when a runaway pack of mules pulling a wagon with herself and baby sister, she saw her mother step into the path of that wagon and wild mules to stop the runaway team saving them from certain death. She took the baby out of the writer's arms and walked into the house without uttering a word. No hug, no "thank you, Lord." She did not need

to say anything; her actions spoke for her. Without a doubt she loved her children; yet, the writer seldom saw her mother demonstrate outward expression of affection. The writer's children have noted the tendency not to show a lot of open affection. It is not intentional because she loves them more than herself and has found herself smothering them with control issues. It is believed that her mother suffered from undiagnosed severe depression. God, through the power of prayer, has sustained her throughout her life of single parenting and chronic illnesses of herself and her oldest daughter.

The Early Years

During the younger years, the writer's mother did not attend church, and the writer would attend church with her aunt. At the age of twelve, her aunt urged her to go to the "mourner's bench." She accepted Christ that year and joined the Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church. From the time she was a teenager, the writer had a functional knowledge of God's Word, and she would later teach adult Sunday school. Her mother began to attend church during the writer's pre to early teens years and would always seem happiest as she witnessed her daughter teaching Sunday school or singing solos for the church. Suspicions of a gospel singer was expected in the future.

The writer's mother attended her graduation and for the first time she experienced her mother crying tears of joy when she received her diploma. The writer felt a strong urge to give her mother a hug, but the mother initiated an awkward hug. This was one of the two times she felt her mother's hug. A two-dollar pair of shoes had been purchased for the writer to wear. They only lasted two days before the soles came off. This made her mother cry as the writer watched with sadness. She resolved that she would get a job

and help her mother. She placed a large rubber band around the shoe and left home with her cousin two days later to find employment. On the way to Dayton with her twenty-year-old cousin, he fell asleep at the wheel and narrowly missed running head on into a tractor trailer. It was in God's plan for her to make it to Dayton to find a job. This was confirmation that God had things for her to do. God's presence brought her through a childhood of poverty and shame to working at the U.S. Postal Service; and as promised, she began to provide financial assistance for her mother and younger siblings.

Adult Life in Dayton, Ohio

You start to live when you commit your life to a cause higher than yourself. You must learn to depend on divine power for the fulfillment of a higher calling.¹

After moving to Dayton, the writer immediately joined her present church but would later stop attending church altogether as she journeyed into the wilderness. As a single mother of two children, life eventually led her back to church. But just as in the story of the "Prodigal Son," God welcomed her with love and open arms leading her to her destiny.

Five years after she began her job at the post office, she bought a three-bedroom brick ranch with a lot of space and began to bring her siblings and extended members of her family to Dayton where they found work. She has continued to bring others in who came to look for a job. Only the female siblings and one other relative remained. At the same time she continued to provide financial assistance for her mother. The same year she purchased her home, she tried to bring her mother to Dayton to live with her. Her

¹ Lailah Gifty Akilah, Inspirational Writer, accessed November 8, 2014, <http://www.goodreads.com>.

mother came but did not stay very long. She was beginning to show early signs of dementia at the age of fifty one. This progressively worsened, and she died at the age of fifty nine, having been in a vegetative state for five years.

The Struggle of Single Parenting

The writer did not choose wisely in creating her family. She had children but was not successful in compatible relationships. After an emotional break up of a love affair, her oldest daughter, who was then thirteen, convinced her to go back to church. This she did and made a commitment to follow Christ. Employment as a postal worker while parenting two children was quite challenging. A major issue was finding appropriate child care. Therefore, when her children were ages eleven and three, she sent them to Alabama to live with her sister -- a decision she deeply regretted. After they had been away for five months, a very dreadful and ominous feeling with a sense of urgency compelled her to go and get them. Hoping to surprise them with the joy of being reunited, the oldest daughter just gave her a blank stare and walked away. This was very disturbing. On the way back to Dayton in the crowded back seat of the vehicle, the mother could feel the child's heart beating rapidly. Getting back to Dayton, she put the children to bed. Providence would have it that as the mother walked down the hallway, she "sensed" or saw the sheets that were covering her eleven-year-old moving. She discovered that it was her child's heartbeat. The next morning she made an appointment to be seen that day, and an emergent examination of the child revealed her to be on the verge of a stroke or heart attack. Her blood pressure and heart beat were far too high for an eleven-year-old.

Numerous visits to the doctor with the youngest in tow eventually led to two cases of pneumonia for the then-four-year-old. Suffering from a chronic illness of her own, this took a toll on the mother and all ended up ill. While at the doctor's office, she was told that she too had pneumonia and with chronic lung conditions, the doctor had made arrangements for her to be admitted to the hospital. Having no one to care for her kids, the mother went home and put her children in bed with her, one on each side. She knelt at the foot of the bed between the children and began to pray. There was no one available to help. If God was to take her, she somehow hoped he would take the children also – though she prayed that they would be healed. She fell asleep with an arm wrapped around each child and awoke the next morning with no fever. The children's fever had left as well. Again, God moved mightily in her life.

The writer met her husband when her oldest daughter was fifteen and her youngest daughter was seven. She also felt she owed it to her children and to God to live a life of Christian integrity. It was not an easy marriage, but they endured the hardships of a rocky marriage that finally stabilized. The writer's husband had two sons by two mothers. They settled into the black "Brady Bunch" with five grandchildren, four girls and one boy. The writer's husband never committed to church attendance having had a "bad childhood experience" with church. She often wondered if her witness was weak. This was disturbing. A sanctified woman should sanctify her man.

God was calling. The writer became an active choir member and soloist. Singing was therapeutic as the words of the spiritual songs enabled her to empty herself of emotional struggles. The glory belonged to the God she testified about. During a sermon one Sunday morning, the preacher suggested that choir members needed to come to bible

study and Sunday school in order to learn more about the God they were singing about. She was challenged to learn more about the God she was singing about, lest there be no authenticity. Convicted, she was committed to Sunday school immersing herself in God's Word. Study and discussion of God's Word filled a void. Several years later she became the lead Sunday school teacher for the seniors of the church. Since taking the position of teacher, her class has grown from three to twenty-one. Teaching has indeed played a major role in her spiritual formation as detailed study of Scripture has indeed brought her closer to God. She continues to learn as she conducts workshops in Christian education.

Reflecting on the writer's re-commitment to Christ, she felt this helped to stabilize her family and was key in helping her through yet another spiritual storm. The writer's older daughter revealed that she had been sexually molested repeatedly by male relatives when she sent them to Alabama to live with her older sister because she had a problem with finding appropriate child care while working the late shift at the postal service. This information was overwhelming and the writer once rode out an emotional mess bound with guilt, especially after she revealed she was gay. This was almost unbearable because the writer felt that this was due to negligence on her part by sending her daughter away where she could not closely watch her. Later, in her adult life, the daughter revealed that she had been molested in the writer's household. The guilt became almost unbearable as she had allowed two nephews and two brothers to live in her house. Her feelings of incompetence as a mother grew increasingly worse and she began to regret her choice to become the single mother of two children. (Interestingly enough, she rejected the proposal to marry the oldest child's father that would have provided a two-parent home and what she believed would have been a stable family). She blamed herself

for her choice and began to seek answers. She was too embarrassed to talk to anyone about it.

One day she called the president at United Theological Seminary. He did not provide any specific answers. She constantly thought about entering seminary where she felt she could get a better understanding of God and what God would have her do, feeling she had failed as a mother. She felt desperate to save her child. Her daughter was twenty-five at that time. The writer believed that homosexuality was wrong in God's sight; however, all sin is wrong in God's sight. She was very hard-nosed and unyielding in accepting her daughter's lifestyle. She felt that while she committed her life to God, she lost her daughter to a life that was not pleasing to God. She felt it was a retaliatory satanic attack. Her daughter responded by being very loving and supportive but continued the lifestyle of her choice. The writer's husband was instrumental in providing the emotional support and understanding the writer needed during this period. Though she never discussed the issue of her daughter's lifestyle with her husband, he must have known as he was very supportive and provided the much needed comfort for her to get through this.

A Consciousness of Women's Inner Struggles Begin

As the writer reflected on her daughter's lifestyle, she thought of continued pain and suffering her daughter would not have had to endure had she been married to her daughter's father. Her daughter's father was very angry when he found it out as he too was very closed-minded and judgmental regarding the issue. The hurting part is that her daughter loves her father so much, and it is very painful to hear her daughter express the longing for a relationship with the father she lost after revealing her lifestyle of choice.

His daughter of his marriage is also lesbian, and the writer began her quest for answers. Perhaps this may have been the time the writer's vision of advocating for hurting women began. She is reminded of God calling Paul to minister to the Christians he persecuted. In doing so the writer had to remove barriers of bias and judgmental attitudes and build up the walls of unity through serving those who were different. God loves those who are attracted to the same sex as God does everyone else. God loves all of humankind as God gave God's only son for all of humanity.

Seminary introduced the writer to a new perspective of her daughter's life style, providing the writer with the faith to leave all loved ones and concerns with their wellbeing in the hands of a loving God, who is the ultimate and righteous Judge. Love for someone shapes the desires for the lives of the loved one. However, it should be realized that it was God's love that gave humanity choices. Otherwise, humankind would not be as we see it today, but divine puppets. Her prayer is that God will keep her family in God's will. The eighth century prophet, Micah, puts this into proper perspective: "What does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Micah 6:8). The rest is left to God. Sometimes your heart needs more time to accept what your mind already knows.

The negative impact the writer's life had on her is the fact that she can be sometimes stubborn, untrusting and cynical, defensive and sometimes downright abrasive. She can be very outspoken and opinionated, yet she is very sensitive and easily offended. She makes a conscious effort to walk with God and remain close in Spirit lest her feet slip. It sometimes becomes a struggle to back down when she thinks she is right. Once when preparing to pump gas at a service station, she noticed when she took the

nozzle from the pump the gauge was already registering three cents. Too late, she began to pump but stopped immediately when she saw the gauge. She confronted the cashier about this, and he implied it was only three cents. The writer persisted and told him that three cents were important to him. It was just as important to her as it belonged to her. Her husband tried to get her to let it pass, but she would not.

Who the Writer Has Become

As appropriately noted by Lailah Gifty Akilah, “The toughest journey is the spiritual journey.”² To use a well-known cliché, the writer is best described as “a work in progress, a diamond in the rough.” Lately, she has come to recognize that she does not have to always have to have the last say and is learning to keep her thoughts to herself. Training as a chaplain also played a major role in the development of her spiritual growth. She acquired the gift of listening, which is a powerful tool for learning. She has learned that listening contributes to wise decision-making. She has been empowered with the gift to listen and the courage to hear. The writer’s life and the events that took place in shaping her life have led her into being a deeply spiritual person. She has made so many mistakes and missteps in her life; she had to seek a deeper and closer relationship with God or she never would have made it. As the words of a popular songwriter resonates in her spirit, “I almost let go, felt like I just couldn’t take life anymore. The devil thought he had me, but Jesus reached and grabbed me and he held me close so I wouldn’t let go.”³

² Ibid.

³ Kurt Carr, “I Almost Let Go,” Song Lyrics, accessed March 6, 2013, <http://www.songlyrics.com/kurt-carr/i-almost-let-go-lyrics>.

Through furthering her education to the present level, the writer has deepened her intellect. Knowledge is power; knowledge empowered by the Spirit is Wisdom. Thus, she is wiser. Her social skills and personal skills have improved 100% as she was a complex personality. She has become a person who is committed to civic duties and is willing to do her part to contribute to the cause of kingdom building through advocating for social justice. Her family continues to make favorable comments on how different and more positive and relaxed she has become. She is a woman who not only advocates for women but supports the human cause. Heretofore, she did not understand the definition and implications of feminist theology or the term feminist and was hesitant to be called feminist. Thank God for seminary and the gift of promoting spiritual awareness and most importantly, for the writer's self-awareness. She enjoys the role of being a woman and all the attributes of womanhood, i.e. the love of husband, being a mother and enjoying the special treatment and recognition one gets as a woman.

After committing her life to service for God, a denominational divide took place between the writer and several of her siblings. What was once a close-knit family relationship became strained and distant. The older sister converted to the Pentecostal faith causing much dissension between the writer and those who converted along with her oldest sister. The writer refused to leave the Baptist denomination. As the writer continued to study the bible, she became more aware of "control issues" among church goers. The writer's oldest sister continued to admonish her about being in the wrong church and continued to pray and prophesy that she would "join her in her faith." Her sister passed away from multiple myeloma in 1998, and though she loved and admired her sister, she did not see her as her role model in her faith practices. We don't follow a

small group of people who believe as we do. Each day the writer is open to hearing and learning from God, not what a group of people have determined to be fact, omitting parts of Scripture that teaches people to be inclusive. The Holy Spirit teaches people as they move through this complicated journey.

Family gatherings almost always turned into heated debates as the sister continued her effort to bring the writer from “among them.” The writer would not convert, neither did her youngest sister. This did not make her love her sister any less, and she was often burdened with her own stubbornness; yet, she could not bring herself to convert. Her sister passed away, leaving her sometimes feeling guilty because she did not grant this “happiness” to her sister. She really misses her sister as she was her mentor, and she was there for her as her mother was absent a lot. She learned the things a young girl should know from her sister as her mother never spoke to her about these things. The writer felt she “lost” her mother to the illness that had begun while the writer was in high school. The writer began to strongly consider entering seminary, seeking answers and understanding.

Some years ago, while watching a documentary on troubled and imprisoned youth, she took note of the young man who was being interviewed, serving life for the drive-by murder of an eight-year-old girl. As the commentator asked the question, “What is the answer?” the writer actually heard a voice that said: “the answer is Jesus.” This would lead her to compose a drama depicting the violence and social dysfunction affecting society today.

Serving in the ministry of chaplaincy for two-plus years in local hospitals, the writer had the opportunity to minister to many broken and displaced women on the

mental health wards. She witnessed constant pain and suffering leading her to contemplate a plan which would help to heal the wounds of some of these people. She recognizes that hurting people hurt people. Children grow up in abusive environments and will reproduce this behavior as adults. This becomes cyclical. Our responsibility is to provide the presence of God by developing programs which will help to alleviate some of the suffering. This can only be successful if those persons involved reflect the spirit of love and commitment that Jesus spoke of in Luke 4:18-22.

The Call

The writer's call has repeatedly been affirmed through further experiences in her life. One particular instance took place in the fall of 2000 when the pastor of the Gospel Mission spoke at her church during a mission service. The call of God was so obvious that it seemed almost audible. As he expounded on the daily encounters with the homeless and otherwise marginalized, the vision and plan to carry it out was acute. There was no mistaking this vision was from God. Proverbs 19:21 informs us that there may be many plans in a person's heart, but only the purpose of God will prevail. As the gentleman spoke, I began to visualize a ministry similar to this in my context. I understand more clearly now that God's purpose for me in this contextual setting was being revealed. The plan was unfolding in my mind, and God's purpose was to be carried out. Two months later the writer, in collaboration with several other members of the ministry of "Caring and Sharing," established a support group which included the surrounding community, led by Rev. Anthony Wilburn, associate minister. It later evolved into the Women's Ministry under the umbrella of Caring and Sharing. The

original group provided various outreach efforts including cleaning the homes of the elderly, providing emergency financial assistance from our personal resources, holding clothing drives, visiting the sick and providing support for the bereaved. It also provided fellowship meals for Job Corps' students.

Another affirmation of her call relates to a progressive illness that attacked her at the age of twenty-nine. She was told she would not live past fifty-five years of age. God's purpose for her life was being carried out. The late Dr. Myles Monroe once said "the greatest tragedy in life is not death, but the greatest tragedy in life is life without a purpose."⁴

God calls the qualified and prepares the qualified. Seminary was further preparation and proved very useful for the works of a women's ministry. The hand of God moved as God led her through seminary as she failed a class and would have given up except for the support system God had placed there to bring her through. Thank God for Dr. David Whitford, Rev. Merritt Worthen, Dr. Robert Walker, Dr. Vivian Johnson and Dr. Emma Justes. It was through their strength and support that she completed the master's studies and is now nearing the finish line of the doctoral program.

The required transcultural trip for the Master's program took her to Turkey. While in Istanbul, Turkey, she witnessed the horrible oppression of women there. She visited a secluded and "hidden away" Christian Mission which housed an orphan and a shelter for mothers who had no homes for their children. There is no social system there and if these women are found on the street, they are thrown into jail where they suffer torture of rape and beatings. They prostitute themselves to make enough money to provide for their

⁴ The quote was taken from an excerpt of a video of one of Dr. Myles Monroe's sermons which was undated and untitled.

families and keep them off the street. If they are caught doing this, they are still thrown into jail. The orphanage houses children of these women on the tenth floor of a building so that their cries are not easily heard or located. The mission gives them food and provides diapers, milk and other needs. The mothers are trained to make jewelry to sell to provide for their needs. The writer was moved to make financial contribution while there, but she made a commitment to herself that this would not be her last contribution. If they were not able to help in this ministry, then they would find something similar. She obtained contact information located in Cleveland where she could send further help in the way of supplies. The writer presented this as an outreach ministry to the support group in which she is a part. It has been slow and hard to do since the members did not witness this situation first hand as did the writer as she regularly reflects on that trip with visions of the babies.

The End in Sight

To God be the glory! She completed her Master of Divinity degree in December 2010. She continued her quest for higher spiritual learning and developmental and ministerial training by completing four units of CPE and passing board certification in July 2012. She still becomes discouraged as she has not been able to obtain a job as a chaplain. The writer cannot be negligent in mentioning the real champion of her long and hard fought battle with the curriculum of United Theological Seminary. That person is none other than her spouse, Raymond, who read many, many publications, stayed awake with her at night proof reading papers, helping her with book reviews, housekeeping, running errands for the house, and most of all, providing a shoulder to cry on when she

felt she had failed. Many nights they prayed together. The graduation diploma should have his name as co-Master of Divinity. Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) prepared the writer for one-on-one ministry by being there for those who need to be ministered to on a personal level. The gift of spiritual discernment was very helpful in her encounter with patients during CPE. Having taken courses in Pastoral Education (Intro to Pastoral Education, Alcohol and Drug Rehab, and Interpersonal Violence), the writer determined that she was called to the area pastoral care counseling and social justice.

During the period of unemployment, she spends a great deal of time studying the bible and reading other educational and inspirational materials which includes *Healing Trauma*, by Carolyn Yoder; Maxillary Haxton's *Understanding the Trinity*; E.G. White's *The Desire of the Ages*; Robert Jenson's *Systematic Theology: The Works of God and The Triune God*; Cari Jackson's *The Gift to Hear, the Courage to Listen* and other writings. The writer continues to volunteer for hospice and another local extended care facility. It is when the writer is providing comfort care to any individual in pain, suffering and grief that she feels closest to God as the presence of the Spirit is comforting. As a spirit-led person of faith, the writer believes she can make a contribution to a society that seems to be in total chaos. In keeping with Mark 2:4, we have to be creative in our ministries in order to reach those people in areas others fail to see. God given gifts of the Holy Spirit, enhanced with theological understanding, are the tools that are used in the kingdom building. There have been many disappointments in the writer's life, even since obtaining theological education and clinical pastoral training; but this is to be expected.

Overcoming obstacles builds character and determination as well as increases faith. The pain of disappointments and rejections are to be viewed as growing pains, and they have

produced an enduring faith while the writer follows the plan God has purposed for her life. Her ministry of context is carried out at St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church here in Dayton, Ohio, under the conservative and traditional leadership of Pastor Sylvester Walker, who openly admits that he has a problem with women in the pulpit, stating that God has not revealed it to him to do otherwise. He has not hindered her passion for one-on-one ministry. A women's ministry was founded and has been met with a huge response from the women of her church. There were fifteen women present at the first meeting. The response from the women of that group revealed there are many hurting women, even in the church, who are undergoing various social and spiritual issues. The women of the group immediately began to establish a data base for resources, i.e., media and court system.

The writer is thoroughly aware of the black men's resistance to religious liberation for women in her local church. Under the leadership of a pastor, whose tradition has been passed down from the founding pastor, (who only had a third grade education), there is a prevailing androcentric and patriarchal bias with regards to women in leadership. The current pastor is eighty years old and appears to be still unyielding in the liberation of women in pulpit ministry; yet, he has yielded to women teaching. The writer believes she has not left her church because she can encourage women to utilize their God-given gifts and talents as well as lead other women out of a male dominated wilderness of oppression. The women's support group and the number of women who came with various stories further confirm that there is much work to be done. The writer is inspired by three parables in the bible relating to lost and found: The lost sheep, the lost coin and the prodigal son. The lost coin was most poignant and reflects the story of the

women's support group. The lost coin was in the home of the woman who lost it. There should be a continuing search for lost coins in the "homes" of the searchers. There are many "lost coins" in our churches today. Many women spend week after week of attending worship and praise, shouting hallelujah to the Most High God, only to go home and do nothing until the next gathering. Many women feel they have nothing to offer because there is no one to encourage them in their God-given gifts. Continued self-reflection and spiritual growth are the source of the writer's enlightenment that helps her along the way. She has even preached in public settings. She has lost her fear but still experiences a little uncertainty when standing before a group of people. God's Word is a precious commodity and has to be handled with care and certainty if one is to share it in a public setting which inspires more humility in her own approach to certain issues and conflict. Nevertheless, the writer has volunteered to partner with her brother in planning and promoting an evangelistic thrust for her brother's church which only has about twelve active members, including his household. With the guidance of God, she and her brother will work together to develop an evangelistic plan for her brother's twentieth church anniversary. Her decision to pursue a doctorate in ministry was influenced by her work in the ministry. This provides her with excellent developmental tools as she studies the church and continues to develop her faith. Education is key in carrying out the works of kingdom building. The harvest is great but the laborers are few. As aforementioned, the one time the writer saw her mother cry tears of joy was the night the writer graduated from high school. Now, forty-seven years later, the writer dedicates the challenges, discomfort and disappointment, joy and triumph of this spiritual journey, to the memory of her mother and gives God the glory. Her only regret is that her mother was not able to

share in her journey. Since walking across a small stage in a rural high school in Carrollton, Alabama, the daughter, who watched her mother express tears of joy for the first time, hereby dedicates all of her achievements to her mother. For the tears of sadness, because of the two-dollar shoes that ripped apart the day after she wore them, she credits her determination to succeed. She is the only child of her mother's eight children to obtain a college degree. She is fully aware that having a degree means nothing if you do not know God. She still misses her earthly father, whom she felt left her too soon, but he has been replaced with God the Creator, who is the Father of her father, and will never leave her or forsake her.

Contextual Setting

St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church is located in northwest Dayton, Ohio. The community is called Wesleyan Hills. It is served by the Northwest Priority Board in the Dayton Public Schools District. There are two schools located in this district: Rosa Parks Elementary and Miami Valley Child Development Center. This district is on the boundaries of Greenwich Village which is bordered on the West. The Northern Hills community is to the North. Other areas proximal to this community are Dayton View Triangle, Princeton Heights, Cornell Heights, Old Dayton View and Southern Dayton View. The community of context borders on the East by College Hill; all of which is a part of the Northwest Priority Board. Gettysburg School, which was situated directly west of the church, was located across Gettysburg Avenue. It was razed within the last two to three years. The location of the church itself is encompassed by similar socioeconomic classes extended northward. To the immediate southeast, housing is indicative of more

middle to upper class status. The socioeconomic class in the area surrounding the church itself is lower middle class.

Demographics

The 2010 Census report reveals this area has undergone a 49% decline in its population. This reflects a drop from 1,797 housing units in the 2000 census to 1,285; occupancy dropped from 1,156 to 603. This also reflects a rise in vacancy from 641 to 682; owner occupied dropped from 312 to 176 and renter occupied from 844 to 427⁵ (See Appendix A). As noted above, the community lost one elementary school bordered on the west but gained a newly constructed building in the community of Wesleyan Hills: Rosa Parks Elementary. This area is largely populated by African-Americans.

The decline from 2010 noted a drop in the age group of 0-17 from 1,158 (38%) to 489 (32%); age group of 18-34 dropped from 765 to 393, yet noting a constant percentage of 25%; 35-54 noted a drop from 722 to 363 and a 24% constant; ages 55 to 64 noted a drop from 199 to 155 with an increase from 7 to 10% (these percentages are questionable); ages 65+ dropped from 166 to 142 (again note an increase percentagewise) from 6% to 9% (See Appendix A).

Education in this Wesleyan Neighborhood

Children three years and older in K-12 schools in the Wesleyan Hills area reflect 26% with an even smaller percentage in undergraduate and colleges at 4% compared to

⁵ Census Report, Wesleyan Hill Neighborhood," accessed March 23, 2013, <http://www.cityofdayton.org/departments/ped/Documents/Census%2010DaytonCensusSummaryReport.pdf>

the overall city of Dayton at 9.6%. The Wesleyan Hills area shows a serious deficiency in grade or professional schooling at 0%. Dayton reflects a 1.0% in grade or professional school. The percentage of students K-12 enrolled in private schools in the Wesleyan Hills area is 3.3% compared to overall Dayton of 17.1% (See Appendix A).

Occupation of females

The percentage of females in management occupations (except farmers) in the Wesleyan Hills area is 1.4% compared to the city of Dayton of 4.3%. There is a small percentage of females in architecture and engineering occupation reflected by 1.1% compared to the city of 0.7%, reflecting a positive ratio of architects and engineers of females in this area compared to the city of Dayton. The percentage of females in legal occupations in this area is 1.3% compared to the city at 0.8%. The percentage of females in education, training, and library occupations here is 5.6%, which falls below the overall city at 6.4% (See Appendix A). The percentage of females in healthcare practitioners and technical occupations in this area is 5.7% which is slightly below the city's rate at 5.9%. The above noted data shows that females are less likely to hold high-paying professional jobs such as engineering and other technical positions in this area as their educational level reflects no professional or graduate school. Thus we see an increase in the percentage of service occupations of female at 36.8% compared to the overall city at 24.4%. The percentage of females in sales and office occupation is almost comparable at 24.9% employment of females in these occupations compared to 34.3% in the city of Dayton. These numbers reveal that women in this area are mostly employed in service,

office and sales occupations, which would not indicate a level of higher income in this area among females (See Appendix A).

The percentage of females in construction, extraction, and maintenance occupations, however, do drop at 1.1% compared to the city rate at 0.9%, reflecting a higher percentage of what would be considered manual-type labor. The percentage of females in production occupations is high compared to the overall city at 9.0%. Females in other physical-type labor such as transportation and material moving occupations here is 1.5%. This data is a good indicator of why the neighborhood is not one of high income and professional occupations. Looking at the decline in the population according to the 2010 census versus the 2000 census, the population is declining in this area which is indicative of relocation with higher income (Appendix A).

Leadership in the Community

There are four Baptist churches with active pastors in this location. Bordering Wesleyan Hills to the north at the edge of Northern Hills, there is a Methodist church with a recently appointed pastor. Also, in the Northern Hills district, there is a funeral home. The faith-based community in this area is diverse: Jehovah's Witness Kingdom Hall, four Baptist churches and a Methodist church. What was once described as a thriving and vibrant neighborhood is now showing signs of economic depression in the last fifteen years. There are a number of fast food restaurants, one large grocery store, a drive through and other small businesses, including a bank which is struggling to remain open due to the high robbery rates. The area could rightly be classified as a high crime area which is related to gun violence and drug trafficking.

History of the Church

St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church evolved as the result of a prayer meeting in May of 1931. Seven men and women met and out of this prayer meeting the task of establishing this church was carried out. The founding pastor was Reverend David V. Revere, a man who possessed a third-grade education. A store front church evolved at the corners of Hawthorne and Gale streets. That same year the church was destroyed by a tornado; so the church moved to Sprague Street where it remained until “unethical landlords tried to raise the rent.” The church then moved to Germantown and Hawthorne streets. During the years between 1931 and 1936, the church experienced growth, and as a result, many auxiliaries were organized.

In 1937, St. Luke acted on faith and purchased its first building at Western Avenue and Elwood Streets. The church continued to grow, so they purchased a larger edifice at the corners of Lakeview Avenue and Clifton Drive. Under the leadership of the man with conservative and traditional views, the church continued to grow and this necessitated an addition to the already standing edifice in 1953. Many sons in the ministry were born under this leadership. Rev. Revere pastored for thirty-seven years and was called to his eternal home in October of 1968.

In February 1969, Rev. Sylvester Walker, the current pastor, was installed as pastor of St. Luke. Having trained under tutelage of Rev. Revere, he shared the same patriarchal and conservative views as Rev. Revere. The congregation is a part of the National Baptist Convention, USA and shares varying doctrinal issues of the National Baptist Church USA (NBCUSA). The congregation has remained steady and there have been many accomplishments. Under Pastor Walker’s leadership, a larger edifice was

erected at the current location. This building was built in 2002. God has called many “sons” in the ministry, under the current leadership, many of whom have gone on to shepherd other congregations. The church has to its credit several outreach ministries, i.e., a neighborhood thrift store, a prison ministry, missionary society, Caring and Sharing group and a women’s support group. These ministries have been mentioned earlier in the document. St. Luke shares another of its buildings with a neighborhood martial arts group. The motto of the church is: “This is the church where everybody is somebody and Christ is all.”

Church Demographics

The culture of the congregation consists of a 99.5% African-American population of low to upper middle class. Only about 10% of the population itself receives government assistance with a ratio of 60 to 40% working class to those who are retired. It is difficult to document the number of single mothers in the church, but one could safely say that single-parent households outnumber the married. The average annual household income of the congregation is \$35,000; about 5% of the congregation exceeds six figures. However, the congregation has also suffered a negative impact on the congregation due to loss of jobs overall.

Educational Levels

The percentage of those with less than a high school education is about 1% with 99% with high school education. About 50% of congregation have some college or advanced training. About 20% of the congregation are college graduates, but it is hard to

tell since many will not share their personal data. There are about 20% post graduate persons in congregation. The above numbers are estimated even though they come out of the church's data bank. Without cooperation from the congregation and accuracy in the membership data base, it cannot be determined with accuracy. Nonetheless, the above estimates is by a person who is familiar with the congregation overall. The writer, who was the church's administrative assistant for some years, has a working knowledge of many of these categories. Some of these figures reflect a trending in the direction of becoming a congregation that boasts of higher level of learning. It is indicative of a drastic change with all of the members at least having a high school education. The founding pastor was noted to have only a third-grade education. The second and current pastor, Sylvester Walker, holds a Master's Degree in Religion. Three of the associate ministers hold college graduate level education though not yet completed. Others who have left to become pastors at other church have acquired masters and doctoral levels of education. Currently, there is one known doctoral student. What follows are some demographic figures also gleaned from the church's data bank.

Race and Ethnicity

- Caucasian – 1 female -.3%
- African-American - 99.7%
- House hold structure

Household structure

- Single mothers - 50% - estimated
- Divorces or widows – 30%
- Married – 20%

Average Income

- \$50,000
- Working class - 40%
- Retired or disability - 60%

Ministry Participation

- Active – 35%
- Somewhat active 40%
- Not involved -25%

Worship style

- Preference – Traditional
- Music – Traditional – 75%
- Contemporary – 35%
- Architecture – contemporary (building completed in 2002)⁶

Loss of jobs created a high demand for economic assistance from the benevolent fund of the church. Apparent abuse and emotional trauma is evident, though often not addressed. There has been a tendency to ignore the signs. On many occasions, women have run to the church for protection or help only to be met with resistance or the inability to help. The pastor has verbalized that he fears being “sued” by the perpetrator of these heinous acts. One of the many attacks was witnessed by the pastor and other members of the church. They intervened to stop the attack but were helpless in offering a safe place for the victim. The perpetrator was finally sent to prison on other charges. This seemed to help the victim’s emotional health, though she has fear of when he gets out of jail. Having offered temporary shelter in my home many times in the past for those needing a place to stay, I feel compelled to establish a ministry that would meet the needs of women and children who are victims of unfortunate circumstances such as these. My job as the secretary at the church allowed me to witness a lot of suffering and pleas to the church for financial, emotional, and other forms of assistance. It has caused me to become acutely aware of and sensitive to the needs of the community.

The membership data base records over 700 members consisting of over 50% being baby boomers. The above numbers are questionable as the record keeping system is

⁶ Ibid.

somewhat flawed and inaccurate. There is a computerized data base; however, the members are reluctant or refuse to update changes in household or they may be on role as a member but have gone to another church without informing the office. They also are very reluctant to give changes in their family structure (marriage, divorce, etc.). The average attendance is 225 each Sunday. This has remained somewhat steady in recent years. As members move their membership, others join. There have been nine deaths in the congregation year-to-date, one under the age of fifty and one 103 years of age; thirty-four joined; sixteen were baptized, eleven joined on Christian experience and eight came forth for restoration. There has also been an influx of younger members as some of the twenty-five to thirty-five age group have remained and seem to have had an impact on attracting others of the same age group to join.

Household and Family Makeup

This information cannot be presented with accuracy but only through guesswork and close personal observation having served as administrative assistant for over twelve years. Members seem not to be eager to share this type of information. Of note, the church hosts an average of six to ten weddings a year; but again, this is not a clear indicator as to the percentage of married households in the congregations as the church will also host weddings to many who are not members of the congregation.

Age Groups

The congregation is an older congregation with about 12% of its members ranging from eighty to 100 years of age. However, the only centurion passed away in the summer

of 2012, but there are about forty members who range in age from eighty to ninety and are still active. The largest age group is forty to seventy-nine years of age; this is the age group of most of the leaders in the church. This age group make up about 250 members. The percentages of the ages twenty to twenty-nine drop to about thirty as this is the age where members are still “sowing their oats” and are away in college or have moved to another church which has more younger people and more contemporary worship; or they do not come at all since they are adults and make their own decisions as to whether they want to attend church or not. The age group new birth to eighteen has a healthy attendance rate as they are brought to church by their parents. Since they are still in school as teenagers, unless they work, they are usually required to attend church; but as noted above, sometimes they stop attending when they are independent of their parents. Again, the membership data base has an estimated 700 names, including children, in the data base; but they come and go without having made an impact. It is not common for a person to be baptized and join the congregation as a child, only to return for their funeral as an adult. Many parents have been known to keep them active in the data base by continuing to make financial contributions.

Worship Style

Of the 200+ who attend on an average basis, 85% are adults thirty and up. Allowing for some error in the statistics, the church is a more mature congregation who favors traditional worship. The worship is made up of lively singing and hallelujahs with loud shouting and preaching with a slight lean toward being charismatic. The choir seems to be the drawing agent under the leadership of musicians and directors under the age of fifty. There are six musicians, three of whom are compensated. This group has remained intact for some

fifteen years, which is an indicator of commitment to serve in music; however, only two attend regular bible study.

Close observation reveals that the seniors in our church are committed to the congregation as most were raised in this congregation, while there are those who come and go due to losing or having been offended in some way or another. Those who grow up in the congregation are those who do not like the politics or structure of the church leadership. There are several members who have been here since the church was established but are confined because of failing health.

The most prominent age group, as indicated in the chart above, is the age of forty to seventy-nine with several leaders still functioning in their eighties. They usually serve until failing health prevents them from being active or they die in their position. There seems to be an underlying reluctance to vacate leadership positions in the church and many do not attend bible study or Sunday school; thus, it is evident that biblical training is needed.

Leadership Structure

The leadership is that of a hierarchy, and while being Baptist, it is autonomous with the pastor maintaining authority while other leaders are subordinate to the pastor. This does not mean that the congregation does not enjoy a majority rule type atmosphere. They are reluctant to change that has not been initiated or approved by the pastor.

The deacon board is next in line of spiritual leadership with the chairman of the deacons being next in line to the pastor in terms of authority. The ruling order of the church is the board of trustees with a female leader. There was not a male trustee who felt competent to take on this leadership until later and who was immediately moved into the

position of vice-chair. All meetings are governed by Robert's Rules of Order. There are four quarterly church meetings per year where each member is allowed to add concerns to the agenda for discussion. All ministries have leaders but all are under the guidance and direction of the pastor.

Pastoral and Church Staffing and Ministries

Currently the church staffing ministry is comprised of the pastor of thirty-five years and five ministers, all who fill the preaching needs when the pastor is not available. (On a sad note, we lost a younger minister to death earlier in the summer). There is also a fulltime secretary and custodian. The rest of the staff, which is part-time, includes church clerk, book keeper, minister of music, choir director and percussionist. It should be noted that the church manages to meet all of the needs of maintenance and upkeep with a part-time staff. The church has under its teaching ministries a Sunday school, vacation bible school and bible studies. There is a missionary department, sisters on a mission group, and a missionary department. The outreach ministries of the church include:

- St. Luke Community Thrift Shop, established in 2004 under the guidance of the late W.P. Madison, trustee chairman. The church also provides space without cost to a martial arts studio. While the church finances the upkeep of the building, there has yet to be direct interaction with students nor leaders for the evangelistic purposes.
- Caring and Sharing Group was established in 2000 in collaboration with Minnie Bonner, Myra (Hines) Wilburn and Georgia Alexander, later to be led by Minister Anthony Wilburn, spouse of Myra.
- Women's Support Group of St. Luke was founded during the summer of 2012 in collaboration with Myra Wilburn and Georgia Alexander. Georgia Alexander is convener/facilitator; Myra Wilburn is secretary/publicity/facilitator. The group consists of twenty plus members of all ages from all over the community. There is no membership requirement to become a part.

- There are many events in the past which have been exclusive but with more Christian education, the congregation seems to be trending toward more outreach and inclusivity.
- St. Luke Scholarship Committee is chaired by another member who transferred in and expanded the scholarship program. She has adopted the ministry of encouragement of students who achieve by acknowledging their hard work and achievement each grading period such as honor roll, dean's list, etc. Students who aspire to attend college are given monetary scholarships. This includes older adults who go back to school.
- Seasoned Women of St. Luke is comprised of women over seventy years of age. These women regularly hold activities which will give them access to more recreational activity.
- St. Luke's Book Club invites everyone with a love for reading to meet to discuss popular books they have read. This was founded by Elizabeth Taylor.

As an active member of this congregation since October 1987 -- serving as adult lead Sunday school teacher, workshop presenter, trustee, administrative assistant, lead soloist of the choir, leadership activity in two support groups (Caring and Sharing and Women's support group), most of this information has been compiled from personal knowledge and interaction with the congregation and overall experience and close observation. Some of the information was obtained from church bulletins and personal construction of annual programs.

Concluding Observations on Context

This congregation could be safely described as conservative/traditional. The church has not openly acknowledged gay ministers, but observations would indicate "don't ask don't tell." The stand against women in the pulpit is firm. The average attendance at weekly prayer and bible study is twenty-five. This has a tremendous effect in the effectiveness of ministry in the church. The worship style is high praise and lively

as a whole. The lack of a mission statement has been mentioned to the pastor, and it is the understanding that he is currently working on one. There was a “temporary” mission statement submitted in order to gain nonprofit status but nothing final has been submitted.

While maintaining stable attendance, growth is slow; activity is prevalent, yet there are concerns of a “disconnect” between the mission and theology of the congregation overall or lack thereof. The resources are plentiful among members. The question remains as to how to activate the fertile minds of those who are willing and ready to participate in outreach ministry together with other social agencies in the community. As people join in our church, many often leave again, which seems to indicate they are searching for something. If they do not find it there, they move on, continuing their search.

Humankind is inherently inquisitive, continuously asking questions and seeking answers. One question will forever be in the writer’s mind: “Had the couple in the Garden of Eden not been inquisitive, what would be the state of humankind today?” Since the Fall of Man, teaching of religion has remained in the forefront of the human mind. Prayerfully, the quest for knowledge of religion and faith will inspire the congregants of this congregation to higher heights of learning and sharing as they learn.

Jesus said the harvest is great but the laborers are few. The location of this church community gives access to a rich mission field. There are many opportunities for social and spiritual networking. This type of networking provides opportunities for potential partnerships in outreach ministry, education and training as well as other needs of the community. This writer believes outreach ministries and other direct involvement will

have a profound impact in helping to alleviate some of the crime, poverty and other social ills.

The writer is currently in the process of writing a proposal to the leadership of this congregation. This proposal is to renovate one of the vacant properties for the purpose of establishing a safe house and a women's center. Since the women's group branched off from Caring and Sharing, the writer has observed them to be more candid and vulnerable; yet, they have all demonstrated a desire to work. The writer believes it is because they do not feel intimidated by the threat of male dominance.

According to the demographics regarding education and occupation of the female population in the Wesleyan Hills Community, it is a rich mission field for outreach ministry. There is an obvious need to assist the low income families and provide training for better income for the single household. The writer prays that God will lead the way.

Synergy

In the late 1940's and early 1950's this vision from God began to grow in the heart of a young female. It was not known to this young child as she began the journey in an answer to the call of God to serve as a change agent where she would help her people. The vision became more pronounced as she became an adult. The eighth-century prophets provided the foundation and reinforcement of her vision as they spoke to the needs of justice and love for God's people. This writer believes that God has called her to serve God's purpose as a champion for social justice.

Born the fourth of eight children and raised in a single parent home, she was raised by a single mother who separated from her only husband before the child turned

two years old. It is her belief that this led to a solid faith in the Almighty God, simply “knowing” in her heart that there was a God who “had the whole world in His hands.” In fact, it was the first song this young lady, who would later become a lead soloist in a large choir, would learn to sing. She truly believed that it was this God who sustained her through a tumultuous life of dysfunctional household of domestic violence, sibling conflict, racism, social injustice and abuse. Many times as she lay on her back on the bare ground, she would study the clouds in the sky with wonderment about a God who had such large hands. At night she would lie on her back in the dew-soaked grass and stare at the stars and imagine a faraway place marked by the stars which she believed marked the destination to which she would travel that led away from the abject poverty in which she lived day after day. She often discovered her mother in a depressed state crying for no apparent reason only to be rejected and dismissed when she would show care and concern. The disadvantaged socioeconomic conditions along with a strong desire to help her mother and siblings gave strong motivation for her to leave home at the age of seventeen in search of a better life. Working in the hot cotton fields for a farmer, whom she felt was getting rich at her expense, continued the desire to leave that land where she felt there would never be justice. This was the impetus which would give her courage to relocate to Dayton, Ohio. The year was 1965 at the height of the Civil Rights movements, racism and Jim Crow segregation. It was a way of life she had learned to accept; but with the onset of the Civil Rights movement, naïveté gave her the false hope that justice would be found. At the age of eighteen, the hand of God moved and she found solid and gainful employment with the U.S. Postal Service. Two-and-a-half years after leaving the South, while at work, the announcement came over the public address system that Dr. Martin

Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated. She remembers weeping while ranting at the whites who cheered. It was with sober and stark realization that the writer accepted that the justice she sought in relocating to the “North” had only been displaced as it still lived deep in the hearts of the perpetrator that hated enough to assassinate a warrior for justice for all. A strong distaste for injustice was firmly planted in her heart. After leaving her home in Alabama, she still maintained faith in God, though she drifted away from regular church going to experience the bright light and big city. However, when the bright lights and big city drove her back into “the loving arms of Christ,” she returned with a commitment to serve. Regular bible study led to her serving in the ministry of adult Sunday school teacher. This increased her desire to grow in knowledge where she developed a more intimate relationship with Christ.

Heeding the Call.

In the fall of 2006, a long time yearning to attend seminary was fulfilled as she enrolled at United Theological Seminary. Her intention was to seek a certificate in Christian Education and leave the institution. Surprisingly she discovered a large group of supporters who encouraged her to return each semester. God provided a way which led to her obtaining a Master of Divinity in December 2010. As secretary of her church, she was asked to write a tribute to the pastor for a souvenir booklet for the Pastor’s Appreciation Sunday. Envisioning the role of a pastor, the following scripture was revealed: “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to

preach the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:18-19, NRSV). During studies for the Masters of Divinity degree, the professor presented the same text in in New Testament class which led her to a better theological understanding. As she frequently referenced the text in class, giving credence to the drive and naming the call as the Social Gospel, Dr. Kendall McCabe described it as having a “heart for social justice.” The call was not identified at the time as a call to “preach.” At the time of enrollment in seminary, many questioned why she was there if not to “preach.”

Dr. Robert Walker, facilitator of Ministry Formation, who was familiar with her context, asked why she was there and what the pastor was going to think. Feeling a little bit apprehensive, she realized this made her more determined to continue on this journey no matter what my pastor said. She was on a mission and would not be deterred, even by my pastor. Praise God for Dr. Walker, for he has been a part of the journey for the past six years and is very encouraging. As a part of the Baptist tradition, she was fully aware of the fact that her call would not be accepted in her contextual setting. As clear as a bell the following scripture came and spoke to her: “I must obey God rather than man” (Acts 5:29). She moved forward, following the voice of God. Maltreatment and injustice perpetrated by one human to another has always triggered anger in her heart. A favorite quote learned while growing up was, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you” (Matt. 7:12).

During CPE training, a homeless mother brought her one-year old child to the emergency room with pneumonia. The mother tried desperately not to reveal her homeless situation knowing her baby would be taken from her. If it were possible for one to duplicate the pain and suffering of someone else, that night invoked a wave of

emotions as the chaplain cried along with the mother. Not knowing the final outcome of the situation, the chaplain (the writer) resolved to somehow, some way, find the means to provide temporary shelter for someone in her situation. Feelings of empathy for the marginalized and oppressed were heightened. The call to advocate for the disadvantaged and socially exploited was clear. From the time of relocation to Dayton, she provided housing for relatives who came from the south to find employment and housing. On two different occasions she provided temporary shelter in her basement for single mothers and their children. This became a trend as she was the “go-to” person for emergency housing for women and others who needed temporary housing.

A few years ago, while worshipping in a small, storefront church, a fourteen-year-old teenager was identified as having no place to sleep that night. The pastor had found her sitting on a bridge for a long period of time. Worried that she may jump, he convinced her to come to worship with him, which she did; but he did not feel comfortable taking her home with him. The writer felt compelled to bring her home, feed her and allow her to take a shower, launder her clothes, and give her a place to sleep. She was taken to a runaway shelter for teens, but she returned several times. As she shared her story and circumstances, this call became stronger to advocate for her and others who are going through the same story of rape and other forms of oppression and exploitation.

Again, it was the daughter who led the writer back to church, in preparation for her call. After regular observation of providing temporary shelter for those who didn't have living quarters, she suggested starting a shelter for run-aways. It was so easy for the writer to open her doors to strangers. Her husband was always supportive though he kept his distance when they were in the house. He continued to encourage her to enter

seminary to “find her way” and understand more clearly the drive to help others in this manner and share her provisions with others. The writer sometimes reflects with sadness on the young run-away whom she provided temporary shelter. She wonders what happened to the young lady and whether something else could have been done to help better her circumstances. There are still many like her out there. It may not be that this will be carried out under the leadership of her context; still, she must heed the call according to the Word: “I must obey God rather than man.” This means that she must move forward following the voice of God. Maltreatment and injustice perpetrated by one human to another is not condoned by God. The Apostle Paul explains it with much clarity in Galatians 3:28: “...there is neither male, nor female, for ye all are one in Christ Jesus.” Society is in a constant state of turmoil and the faithful must come together as a unit for God and do all they can while they can.

The proposed project is very useful in alleviating some of the pain and suffering of women as they come together to share stories of triumph. Their stories can serve to be liberating as they help relieve someone of bondage through telling their stories. The purpose of the project is to:

- a. Share
- b. Empower
- c. Liberate
- d. Provide support.
- e. Promote healing

The journey has been long, starting before recognition and acceptance to the call to ministry. It is only fitting to affirm the type of ministry she has been called to exemplify,

which is the mission of Christ as described in Luke 4:18 and further defined in Matthew 25:35-40. As followers of Christ, the church should certainly not be the oppressor in denying the women the privilege of sharing their spiritual gifts in the process of kingdom building. Thus, the proposal of the feasibility study (ministry project) would allow women to share their stories of oppression and triumph as they take another step toward healing and wholeness.

CHAPTER TWO

THE STATE OF THE ART IN MINISTRY PROJECT

This chapter speaks to the existing literature that authors have put into place addressing specific issues with reference to women who encounter problems similar to those related to women's issues which were studied in the project. The following studies have proven to provide positive input related to issues: Linda Hollies' *Jesus and Those Bodacious Women* and *Inner Healing for Broken Vessels*; Marcia Riggs' *Awake, Arise & Act: A Womanist Call for Black Liberation*; Beverly White Hislop's *Shepherding a Woman's Heart: A New Model for Effective Ministry to Women*; Riet Bons-Storm's and Pamela D. Couture's, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care Counseling*; Vashti McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle*; Delores S. Williams *Sisters in the Wilderness*; Andrew Sung Park's and Clark's book, *The Other Side of Sin*; Keri Day's *Unfinished Business*; and Geri Scazzero's, *The Emotionally Healthy Woman*.

Linda Hollies gives study questions and suggestions at the end of each chapter of the publication, *Jesus and Those Bodacious Women*, with examples of how one can grow in faith, spirituality and, of course, bodaciousness. Hollies' *Inner Healing for Broken Vessels* contributed greatly to the project as Linda had a similar background as this would serve to encourage women in similar circumstances. Linda's candid revelation of her life struggles serves as an inspiration to others with similar tribulations. She provides a workable paradigm for overcoming seemingly insurmountable challenges while promoting personal growth and healing with an eye to the process of becoming a mature functional adult taking advantage of every opportunity to improve themselves. She

instructs women on how to use their personal gifts and talents to create better lives for themselves based on mutual respect of those in her social setting.

Beverly Hislop was a valuable resource for the project in that women's needs go further than luncheons or spring teas. A woman in pain needs "someone safe to be present with her in her pain; someone who empathizes, someone who understands that feelings of shock, disbelief and anger are part of the grieving process and someone who reminds her that there is hope."¹ Chapter Four of her publication provides an investigation with "Internal Understanding: Essence of Womanhood." She provides excerpts of related stories of women (with stories related to the study undertaken in this project). One such area is called "Women's Cognition." This is based on how "women know and process knowledge." They are listed as: "Silence, Received Knowledge, Subjective Knowledge, Procedural Knowledge and Constructed Knowledge."²

- "Silence" is described as when the women do not know how to speak for themselves and accept external authority blindly and are mindless and voiceless. These women will submit to any form of authority even when it may cause harm. Words are viewed as weapons and they have no confidence in learning from words.³
- "Received knowledge" is a state where women cannot see themselves coming up with knowledge. They depend on others for knowledge. They believe in what persons in authority over them say about them. Everything is viewed as black or

¹ Beverly White Hislop, *Shepherding a Woman's Heart: A New Model for Effective Ministry to Women* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), back cover.

² Ibid., 72-73.

³ Ibid.

white with no gray areas. There is only one right answer as they collect from facts, not opinions of their own.⁴

- “Subjective Knowledge” is opposite of “Received Knowledge.” Women reject outside knowledge and only listen to their inner voices and become their own authority, “which is dangerous.” As children, they have experienced betrayal by authorities who failed their trust so they result to feeling they “think for themselves.” They distrust logic and analysis.⁵
- “Procedural Knowledge” is when women invest in knowledge, knowing that “truth must be ferreted out.” They follow a pattern of separateness (impersonal) or connectedness (relational). Those who are separatists are “suspicious of all truth,” everyone including self could be wrong. Thus the investigation to “find the whole” is employed. Connected women depend on relationships and the opportunity to understand others and access their knowledge.⁶
- “Constructed Knowledge” is when women create their knowledge and are able to integrate emotion and mind. They allow the inner and outer world tapes to play simultaneously. This woman is a whole person and has a passion for learning and is enticed by complexity. She is able to relate to others, to empathize and is sensitive to the interior life of others.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

Hislop also reveals that a woman in pain needs:

- someone safe to be present with her in pain
- someone who empathizes
- someone who understands that feelings of shock, disbelief and anger are part of the grieving process
- someone who reminds her that there is hope ⁸

This information is the format of the paradigm used to shape the projected support groups as proposed in the project.

Riet Bons-Storm, in her publication, *The Incredible Woman*, also argues that “women are afraid to speak to pastors and pastoral counselors about their ambivalence because women’s experiences so often challenge the dominant cultural ideals of what it means to be a woman...”⁹ It is suggested that women have a hidden side which may be expressed differently with more honesty and openness if allowed to speak; however, she often does not in order to be accepted by a dominant patriarchal society.¹⁰ Discovery of another interesting concept is that of the “unstory” which is described as the “story that is not there,” meaning there is a story. Women cannot be given a meaning that fits a particular fabric of a self-narrative, resultant of experiences that are “painful and shameful” and hidden away. If this story is told, it would mean not only releasing the pain, but the pain and shame associated with the experience are exposed when told to

⁸ Ibid., back cover.

⁹ Riet Bons-Storm and Pamela D. Couture, *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women’s Silences in Pastoral Care Counseling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 57.

¹⁰ Ibid. back cover.

another person. Their story can only be told to a listener who both understand and “acknowledge the pain and shame,” but will also “accept the person who tells the story.”¹¹

See the excerpt of the narrative taken from Bons-Storms’ narrative:

Acceptable roles for women in society and church have in common dependency on male figures, predominantly on the father, but also the husband, the male superior in a job, and even the son. A woman who does not accept and embody her dependency is easily called ‘a loose woman’ or a ‘domineering woman’ even in sophisticated psychological and theological theories. The roles women are allowed to play, according to the dominant sociocultural narrative, as discussed in chapter 3, restrict women to a narrow space in which they can develop their acceptable identity and self-narrative. Outside this narrow space they enter the vast territory of shame and guilt feelings, mixed with rebellious feelings of an emerging and developing subject quality.¹²

This information is both enlightening and empowering for women who feel they need to be heard but are not bold enough to do so. This is reassuring in that it is a manifestation of a woman’s privilege to be heard.

Vashti McKenzie’s *Not Without a Struggle* provides a chronology of “Historical Perspectives on Female Leadership in Greek, Roman and Jewish Culture and Religion.”¹³ Beginning with the Common Era, 800 BCE through 323 BCE, she gives a snapshot of “the status of women in the ancient Greek society.”¹⁴ In addition, we are given a glimpse of women in “female leadership in “ancient and Hellenistic Greek religion, “status of women in the Roman empire and in religion” and female leadership in the Jewish culture.

¹¹ Bons-Storms, 57

¹² Ibid., 134-135.

¹³ Vashti McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2011), 1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

This informs us that women have not always lived subjugated lives.¹⁵ They were allowed to conduct business and handle their own finances.¹⁶ The book of Acts introduces Lydia, the “seller of purple goods”.

Geri Scazzero shares the makeup of the image of an emotionally healthy woman in her publication of the same title, *The Emotionally Healthy Woman*. Geri began her journey toward emotional health by doing the following: quit being afraid of what others think, quit lying, quit denying anger and sadness, and quit living someone else’s life. She suggests that “when you quit those things that are damaging to your soul or the soul of others, you are freed up to choose other ways of being and relating that are rooted in love and lead to life.”¹⁷ This information is vital in sharing in a support group where women are being mentored.

Delores Williams, in the publication, *Sisters in the Wilderness*, “provides a passionate reading of the story of Hagar and a telling critique of theologies that promote liberation but ignore women of color.”¹⁸ Williams patterns the storyline of this publication after the biblical figure Hagar. She fleshes out the suppressed truth of how God intervened for Hagar because of the disadvantaged state of her social condition. She offers an amazing construction of black theology from the female perspective. Thus William sees “two traditions of African American biblical appropriation that were useful

¹⁵ Ibid., 7.

¹⁶ Ibid, 6.

¹⁷ Geri Scazzero, *The Emotionally Healthy Woman* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), back cover.

¹⁸ Delores Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Book, 2001), back cover.

for the construction of black theology in North America.¹⁹ See below the comparison

Williams makes between Hagar and African American women:

Hagar resisted the brutalities of slavery by running away. Black American women have a long resistance history that includes running away from slavery in the antebellum era. Like Hagar and her child Ishmael, African- American female slaves and their children, after slavery were expelled from the homes of many slave holders and given no resources for survival. Hagar, like many women throughout African-American women's history, was a single parent. But she had serious personal and salvific encounters with God – encounters which aided Hagar in the survival struggle of herself and her son. Over and over again, black women in the churches have testified about their serious personal and salvific encounters with God, encounters that helped them and their families survive.²⁰

In other words, one could conclude that the situation surrounding Sarah and Hagar is still played out today between white and black females. As Sarah was the owner of Hagar, Abraham reaped the benefits as authority over Sarah. White women still hold racial advantage over black women, yet they somewhat share the subordinate role in a male dominant society. In her publication, *Unfinished Business*, Keri Day, revisits black women in the black church and the struggle to thrive in America. She calls on the black churches to become potential change agents in the community. One of her contributions to the project is that she demolishes the common stereotypes that castigate black women in our churches and surrounding community as being morally problematic and dependent on the welfare system for their survival and upkeep.²¹ In the first chapter of the publication, Day raises a critical question: “Is the Black church ‘Home for poor black women?’” She illustrates the settings surrounding popular Televangelist T.D. Jakes’

¹⁹ Ibid., 3.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Keri Day, *Unfinished Business: Black Women, the Black Church and the Struggle to Thrive in America* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 17.

ministry, which he has turned into movies, books and most of all, the sermon topic, “Woman, Thou Art Loosed.” In this sermon Jakes gives, an illustration of the biblical story of Jesus and the “bent woman.” Day paints a vivid image of thousands and thousands of women who follow Jakes. These women are clearly bound by some spiritual, socioeconomic, social or other challenges in their everyday lives from which they are seeking relief. If one would closely examine the lifestyle of T.D. Jakes and the socioeconomic background of many of the followers, there is validity to Day’s question: “Are black churches ‘homes’ or ‘safe havens’ for poor black women, or are they becoming religious institutions driven by the larger demands of our capitalist society?”²² Day supports the foundational theory of the researchers’ project: The black church has the tremendous potential to “transform cultural inequities that stigmatize poor black women as deviant,” while providing a context in which black women can flourish.²³ The context of this research provided rich resources on which to build this project.

The researcher is grateful to Dr. Andrew Sung Parks and Susan Nelson, editors of *The Other Side of Sin*, for providing a description of the lived experience of seeing her mother in constant pain and suffering and not knowing why or how to describe it. The condition was described as *han*; in other words, unresolved suffering or pain. In a handout during his theological presentation, Dr. Parks defined *han* as the wound of victims festering in their hearts for a long time.²⁴ *Han* can be at a personal, community,

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 46.

or ethnic level. In the researcher's mother's suffering there was a personal level.²⁵ This further supported the researcher's claim that a support group could provide the much needed environment in a ministry that would provide a safe and trusted place to share their narratives. This would not only relieve some of the pain but would help those who heard their stories. Dr. Parks further shared that unless "*han* is healed, it perpetuates a vicious cycle of evil, repeating the violence of victimization. For example, the victim becomes a victimizer."²⁶ In the Lord's Prayer we are made aware that Jesus brings up the subject of sin and forgiveness. Jesus forgives sinners of their sins and he calls us to do the same. As we ask for forgiveness, let us be reminded not only of those who have sinned against us but also of those whom we have sinned against. Most often forgotten in our need for forgiveness are those whom we may have violated. Remember the sinner and the sinned against provide wholeness for all.²⁷ The publication, *Please Don't Tell*, gives valuable insight on why there should be a safe hearer and listener; both become vulnerable "whenever secrets are told."²⁸ Dr. Justes warns that the hearer should be careful not to become a "fixer" but a listener or an outlet for a much burdened secret. It is best to lend an understanding ear. She acknowledges that we may be tempted to be a "solver" or fixer, which makes one less vulnerable.²⁹ Dr. Justes also warns that once the

²⁵ Andrew Parks, "Pain Diagnosing Investigation (Theology of the Wounded)" Handout at August 2014 Doctor of Ministry Intensive at United Theological Seminary, Dayton, Ohio.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Emma Justes, *Please Don't Tell* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014), 23.

²⁹ Ibid.

secret is shared, there may be a disconnect or closeness on the part of the speaker. As well for the hearer, there may be a disconnect or closeness experienced by the hearer. Therefore the group should always maintain self-awareness and recognizable and reliable boundaries.³⁰ Providing trustworthy environments opens the doors for persons to share.³¹

Dr. Justes reminded us of awareness of attitudes with regard to diversity of the speakers in our environment. Attitude plays a crucial role in providing a trusting environment as it relates to race, class, gender, culture, age, religion, language, and sexual orientation. Level of education and marital status are also considered. We all have some prejudices and stereotypes and this should not be displayed in the group.³²

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham gives attention to the role and significant impact black women have had on the establishment, movement and stability of the black church. In the publication, *Righteous Discontent*, she highlights the movement in the Black Baptist Church from 1880-1920.³³ Higginbotham reports: "Through a racial and gender-based movement, black women confronted and influenced their social and political milieu, and they did so through the mediating influence of the church."³⁴ It was primarily the fund-raising activity of black women that undersigned the church's mediating function."³⁵ The muted voices of the female have somehow been heard. In actuality, it

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Emma Justes, *Hearing Beyond the Words* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006), 25.

³³ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent* (Cambridge, MA: First Harvard University Press, 1994), 8.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid, 9

has been the actions of the women of the church that their voices have been “heard.”

They have been doers of the Word while under the tremendous burden of sexism imposed on them by a patristic tradition.

Black women comprise two-thirds of the members of the church, yet the axes of equality grind so slowly in relation to giving voice to these women. Through the efforts and actions of the women, the black church has been a center for self-help through the contributions of the women. The black church has been a powerful institution for social and political change in the black community.³⁶ It is a wonderment of how the church has been maintained through subordination of the prophetic voice of the female. One cannot help but marvel at the tremendous potential and rewards there are to be realized through “awakening of the prophetic voice of the female.”

Summary

The literary field is saturated with materials which support the concept that women are still marginalized, ostracized and disadvantaged in a patriarchal world; but there is material that reveals progress in unmuting the female voice as women have made great strides in being able to speak up and to be heard. Their gifts have been proven and the selected material for this project is limited to say the least. The sources used support the writer’s claim by presentation of documented resources revealing how women sharing in confidential support groups lead to steps toward healing and wholeness. The group, “Women and Faith Movement,” is a testament of how women can come together in such an effort and reap astounding results.

³⁶ Ibid., back cover

Where Do We Go From Here

As a peer in the Prophetic Preaching and Praxis focus group, this writer is convinced now more than ever that there is a need for people of faith – of all ethnic groups – to step up in the way that women are treated not only in the church but also in society. This document is being written in the unofficial kickoff to the 2016 presidential campaign. People of faith are not of the same opinion in matters of politics. However, one subject seems to draw bipartisan support of all political parties and that is the issue of equal pay for equal work for women. Discrimination and oppression of women is not only exercised in many churches but also in the work place.

Women today in the market place are paid seventy-seven cents for the dollar that men are paid. The gap is even worse for people of color. African American women earned sixty-four cents while Latino women earned fifty-five cents of that of the male dollar.³⁷ It is not enough for women of faith – and women in general – to gather, pray, study and encourage each other in the faith. Women need fair and equitable treatment in the job market. President Obama signed into law The Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in January 2009. This law provides protection for women who have a case against job pay discrimination.³⁸

Who are these women who are discriminated against? They are mothers, grandmother, aunts, daughters, sisters and nieces. Many of these women already have a burden of raising children as single mothers. They have a hard time getting a fair shake in church as well as society. It is not enough for these women to have female advocates;

³⁷ National Women Law Center, accessed October 6, 2014, <http://www.nwlc.org/resource/lilly-ledbetter-fair-pay-act-0>.

³⁸ Ibid.

they stand in need of male advocates as well. They too have the need to be rewarded for their hard work in an equitable manner.

One of the pieces missing from this narrative is the need for collaboration of men of faith who embrace womanhood and see it not as a threat. Maybe these persons, in concert with women in leadership positions on this issue, will be able to make the first part of the twentieth-first century brighter for women all around than the previous century.

CHAPTER THREE

Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical Foundation of the Focus Group: Prophetic Preaching and Praxis

During the research process, it was revealed to the researcher that the seed for this thesis was planted in her very soul as a child. The researcher grew up in impoverished conditions in the Deep South, one of eight children by her mother and a half-sister to seven siblings by her father. The researcher holds poignant memories of her mother crying silently, feeling helpless as any attempt to inquire or show concern was rejected by her mother. However, the researcher remembers her mother stressing the importance of her getting a high school education. In fact, the researcher sometimes viewed the requirement as a threat because the admonitions were always followed with reminders of dire consequences. The researcher lost her father when she was six years old, which is still painful for her as she reflects on the love she lost in her father. Throughout her childhood and adult life, the researcher has wondered what made her mother cry. She never heard her mother's story as her mother never shared her story. She has often felt that had her mother been allowed the opportunity to tell her story in a sacred and trusted environment, she would have been relieved of some of the burdens of secrets that were the source of her tears. In an attempt to give voice to her mother's story, a feasibility study in which participants will share their stories was begun.

Why This Project

The researcher and her siblings never referred to their mother as “mom,” “mama,” etc. She suspected her mother never felt worthy to be a mom and carried deep guilt complexes about something. Her mother’s name was “Mary Lou,” but she and her siblings referred to her as “Mae Lou.”

Thus, the personal perspective on this project is that the formation of small groups in a trusted and sacred environment is useful in allowing those who carry burdens to share in community of faith where holy listening and sharing of stories may promote healing. This project will be called “Mae Lou’s Project.”

Nelle Morton, author and feminist, describes the deep-rooted, basic and primal need for women to speak their story into healing. It is best understood as a quote from Morton: "If one can be heard to one's own speech, then the speech would be a new speech and the new speech would be a new experience in the life of the speaker."¹ Morton tells the story of a particular woman, who in a women's support group, began her story with the simple words, "I hurt."² For a story to be understood and shared in group setting, it must be allowed to take form by letting the speaker experience fully to the point that she feels relieved and knows that she has reached a finality in her expression and the group also knows in a wordless way of sharing. In the moment of realization when the burden of pain has been lifted up and shared by all, there is a communal and wordless moment very much like the experience of giving birth. The speaker's pain

¹ Nelle Morton, *The Journey is Home* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985). 205.

² Ibid., 202.

resonates within the hearers giving rise to an instant where the hearers are taken into their own deepest experiences and know its true expression before it has been spoken.³

As a woman of faith and an active member of the contextual setting of St. Luke Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, the researcher has held leadership positions as administrator, ministry leader and choir member, which allowed her access to painful and personal stories of the congregants as well as members of the community. Some of the stories provoked painful memories of the researcher's past, and the seed planted as a child only grew as she heard many painful stories from troubled women. As a chaplain at one of the local hospitals working on the behavioral wards, the researcher was often required to listen to many painful stories. It was during this time, with memories of her mother, the researcher decided that encouraging women to share their stories would provide a healing effect. The researcher saw a need to start a women's support group, which included sharing. It was discovered that there was very little opportunity for listening. The women all rushed to just be heard, interrupting others as they spoke. To say the least, it was not a sacred place and the researcher even questioned the confidentiality, although this had been stressed when the group began. Together the researcher and her co-founder of the women's ministry, through hearing the stories of the women, recognized that these women were victims of oppression, even in the church. Paulo Freire contends

³ Ibid.

that is the historical and humanistic task of the oppressed to liberate themselves and their oppressors.⁴

Bev Hislop, author of *Shepherding a Woman's Heart*, articulates the vision of the researcher in the following statement, "I dream of the church becoming a place where hurting women feel the awareness, understanding, compassion and skillful shepherding that Jesus would have given."⁵ She provides food for thought in that she recognizes that some women are not attracted to the spring teas, Christmas luncheons, and other social activities. These gatherings are not enough to make hurting women make a commitment to become involved. A woman's pain goes deeper than the social functions, which merely provide a temporary "fix." She states, "... hurting women (1) need someone safe to be present with her in her pain, (2) someone who empathizes, (3) someone who understands that feelings of shock, disbelief and anger are part of the grieving process, and (4) someone who reminds her that there is hope."⁶

Historically speaking, the church was considered to be a haven of rest, an ark of safety, protecting people from a chaotic and sin-sick world. Women ran to their pastors for pastoral care with an intense need to tell their story. Personal experience of the researcher makes her highly critical and doubtful that one can always find that type of venue in the church at any given time. The researcher realizes that there are churches which provide effective pastoral care; but she has found that many churches are not

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing, 1993), Chapter 3 & 4, accessed January 5, 2013, <http://www.marxists.anu.edu.au/subject/education/freire/pedagogy/ch01.htm>.

⁵ Beverly White Hislop, *Shepherding a Woman's Heart: A New Model for Effective Ministry to Women* (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2003), backcover.

⁶ Ibid.

equipped with leaders who are professionally trained in this type of ministry. In many instances, these women are victims of oppression which can be multidimensional. Yet, there is a failure to recognize the symptoms of oppression as many of the oppressors are victims of oppression. In addition, there are those who have become so caught up in activities that are focused more on self-promotion rather than shepherding the sheep. The researcher has a painful memory of a close relative of her own who was going through a divorce and near nervous break-down despondency. She repeatedly sought counseling from her pastor who was pastor of a mega-church. The closest she could get to any type of pastoral help was to be told to meet one of the deacons in the middle of the day at the church for prayer. The pastor was cordoned off like a high-ranking, high-profile figure, who only allowed certain people access to him and that was after they had to go through his wife who was on staff. Thus, women had little to no chance to speak with the pastor on a one-on-one basis. It would have been easier to get to the Pope.

This resulted in the researcher becoming incensed and disappointed with high ranking pastors who shirk their responsibilities as shepherds. Women are pleading for an opportunity to be heard, further demonstrating the need for the church to be that place where spoken words lead to healing of the soul.

How Will This Project Work?

Ancient history considered the weaker women secondary and this has endured a subjugated state of existence. Stories of maltreatment and marginalization weave their way through the bible and continue into the postmodern area. However, women have begun to enjoy lives of independence, prosperity, dignity and integrity. Biblical narratives

are dominated by male influence while the voices of women have essentially been muted. This qualitative research analysis focuses on capturing the voices of women in their own communities of faith as well as those in the outlying community. The researcher will focus on current literature and other current data in addition to biblical and historical documentation. The proposed project will consist of the formation of a selected group of women who are willing to share their stories as a feasibility study, spanning a six-week time frame. Research for this project has been revealing in that historically women have come together in circles of prayer and worship "to explore their relationships with God, and to celebrate the passage of their lives."⁷

The biblical stories of Ruth and Naomi provide a paradigm of women working together. "This story poignantly highlights many of the issues that African American women struggle with today (e.g., family, security, loss, racism, sexism and survival)."⁸ These women came together in faith and were able to move beyond their identities as wives and widows to establish identities as sojourners and partners in a powerful survival story. "The bond of sisterly love is strong and conquers setbacks and struggles. Just as Ruth and Naomi clung to each other during perilous times, women believers can support each other with the same devotion through prayer and words of encouragement and acts of service."⁹ The story is a message about the value of collaboration, cooperation, friendship, love and trust between two women who came together to establish a community that had a powerful impact in the shaping of Christian history.

⁷ Patricia D. Brown, *How to Start and Sustain a Faith-Based Women's Spirituality Group: Circle of Hearts* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2003), 17.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Italian Duo Tone, ed., *Women of Color Study Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 12.

Patricia Brown provides a model for the project where the selection of women will consist of women who want to be a part of a spirituality group in addition to the problem-centered support groups. Note that spirituality groups are different support or therapy groups, which offer help for addictions or other specific difficulties. The spirituality groups are community-centered of which Brown is a proponent. Her ministry is creating designated women's support groups. The researcher theorizes that designated women's groups are useful in ministries of caring. Brown makes the following claim: "Women's circles create a haven for a place -- a place for us to be who we are, a place to explore our relationships with God and with one another, and to celebrate God's work in the everyday happenings of our lives. Together we come to understand our connection as daughters of Christ and then we reach out in service and mission."¹⁰

The volume of voices continues to escalate as women continue to join in united forces to give voice to their concerns in a male-dominant world. In the 1970's, a grassroots organization was started as a result of women of the church in the Netherlands "discussing with one another their frustrations about church."¹¹ Riet Bons-Storm, author of *Incredible Woman* and professor of Women's Studies and Pastoral Theology at University of Groningen in the Netherlands, contend that women tend to be more open in sharing in an environment in which they are comfortable. She raises a crucial question: "If pastoral care and counseling and listening belong together, and given many pastors are trained to listen, how is it possible that a woman says she cannot talk about her most

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Riet Bon-Storm and Pamela D. Couture, *Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996), 16.

important experiences with a pastor and be taken seriously and understood?"¹² When women come together in a trusted environment without the threat of patriarchal scrutiny and influence, they experience a sense of freedom, which empowers them to break the silence about troubling issues. This allows them to move forward in freedom toward becoming more productive in their churches and community. The coming together of the Women of Faith Movement ultimately evolved into a larger group of women of faith and has become international. Women who are allowed the freedom to speak and act under the power of their own faith are more apt to be fruitful. The bible supports this in Acts 16:11-15. Here one sees an encounter of a group of women meeting outside the city gates and having the gospel shared with them. Thus, the first church at Philippi was begun by a group of women led by Lydia, a business woman.

The Rationale Behind This Project

Groups, similar to the one in the proposed project, have the potential of becoming positive change agents in the agency of church. The trending of women's groups, who advocate the sharing of stories, is growing in an effort to provide support for women with problematic issues. One such agency is Exhale, a group with strong similarities to the one in the proposed project but with a different focus. This group was formed to allow women the freedom to talk about abortions which they had undergone in an effort to move toward healing. Stories are shared with empathy "with a notion to transform the abortion conflict to peace and understanding." The writer of this article shared the following commentary: "These

¹² Ibid.

storytellers are not seeking to persuade their audience, nor gain acceptance for what they went through; the storytellers practice empathy. Through their opening up and by their listening, they show their audience respect. It becomes mutual. There is a connection.”¹³

Women, through supportive efforts, are becoming effective change agents in all facets of society, political and religious. As they share their stories, they are being heard and are becoming more captivating. Their stories speak healing and restoration to brokenness.

God sent prophets such as Micah, a prophet to Israel and Judah in the latter half of the eighth century, to speak words of restoration and holiness. In spite of this, Judah experienced reform and economic growth that left wealthy landowners prospering at the expense of the peasant farmers. These times were fraught with social injustice, oppression and corruption. Micah prophesied with clarity that “God will not tolerate injustice.”¹⁴ If one is to seek atonement, God requires three things: justice, lovingkindness and humility (Micah 6:8). God is not pleased with social injustice and subjugation of God's people today.

However, the predominance of wrongdoing by those in power continues to this present age. Some of the most affected and vulnerable are women who suffer the effects of gender bias. They have had limited power to fight against this abuse of power. Racism, sexism, and classism are the most prominent culprits. Women have endured rape, incest, human trafficking, homelessness, single parenting, and teenage pregnancy. Continued decay of moral values, brought on by greed and a corrupt government, has severely

¹³ “Exhale Pro Voice,” accessed February 23, 2014, <https://exhaleprovoice.org/blog-post>.

¹⁴ Micah 6.

eroded resources for the marginalized. There are very few provisions for widows and orphans who are left to find their own resources. This is a reflection of the ethics and righteousness of the bible. Biblical teachings of the Old Testament prophets revealed that as people of faith, who are entrusted with the word of God, we should answer that prophetic call by responding to the proclaimed word with development of ministries which would help to alleviate the pain and suffering in our society. The message of the eighth-century prophets included mercy and justice in these situations.

Keri Day, author of *Unfinished Business*, considered the positive results between the Christian community and the needs of the marginalized black women. This does not mean that the church would be exclusive in its resources with regard to sex, race or those of other ethnic background. Day suggests black churches have the potential to ease some of the “anxiety” connected with religion whereas many of the poor feel that the church should be there to meet their needs. She further acknowledged that the community of black churches provided the much needed support in the Civil Rights movement in the quest for political freedom and justice within a democratic society in which blacks were denied such rights. Although racism still exists, it has taken on a new form of expression as it is hidden in institutionalized sexism and classism for the marginalized. Classism and sexism are oppressive as they perpetuate social stratification and religious stratification.¹⁵ Social stratification takes the form of preferential treatment based on socioeconomic levels and status and religious stratification based on gender and position in the community of faith.

¹⁵ Keri Day, *Unfinished Business* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 148.

In the epilogue of her publication, *Unfinished Business*, Keri Day points out that poverty among blacks is not the result of personal irresponsibility but is sometimes the result of “institutional (re)production of deprivation.” This means the reproduction of poverty based on economic institutions that leave a population of underclass people behind.¹⁶ Communities, such as the one suggested, come together to share ways of overcoming the obstacles that prevent them from moving forward. Alternatively speaking, it would allow those in need to release their bonds through telling their story.

Biblical Foundation

To fully appreciate God’s view regarding women, this research will shine a light on what the bible teaches about marginalization and oppression of women. The project chosen will focus on how women formed a community of trust and support and overcame the obstacles of oppression and social injustice. Journeying together in a community of support is the process in which liberation can eventually lead to healing. The stories will be shared in a trusted environment in which there will be spiritual support using the bible to authenticate women’s rights to freedom from the bondage of oppression. The Old Testament text is the very well-known story of Ruth and Naomi, a mother-in-law and her daughter-in-law, who are the models of bond of faith and love between two women, whose stories of survival began as emptiness and uncertainty, leading to fullness to a blessed and secure future.

¹⁶ Ibid.

The story begins with Elimelech, Naomi's husband, a citizen of "Bethlehem in Judah," taking his wife (Naomi) and their sons (Mahlon and Chilion) to the foreign land of Moab, because of a famine in their homeland. Ruth 1:1-22 explains why Elimelech would abandon his homeland. "In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. The text, *in the land*, implies 'widespread,' 'not merely a local famine.'"¹⁷ In a foreign country, the unthinkable happened. Naomi and her daughters-in-law lost their male protection to death. This could be perceived as a form of abandonment but without intentional implications. Naomi and her daughters-in-law followed Elimelech and his sons as committed and obedient women of the biblical era culture taught them to do. They were clearly a product of the times; and this also exemplified the patristic dominance of the age in which they were living. Again, it was not by intention to abandon, but circumstances and divine intervention determined their fate. Even in the progressive era of the 21st century, as will be pointed out later in the thesis, women are still functioning in male dominant cultures, regulated by rules of male influence and yes, without question.

A Model of Friendship and Sisterhood

The Book of Ruth is the first book translated into so-called "new languages."¹⁸ This story of love and loyalty between two widows shines brightly in an otherwise dark period of Israel's history. It takes place during the time of the judges and attests to the

¹⁷ Michael Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, 3rd ed (Oxford, NY: Oxford Press, 2006), 392.

¹⁸ J. D. Waard and E.A. Nida, *A translator's handbook on the book of Ruth*, 2nd ed. (New York, NY: United Bible Societies, 1991), x-1.

fact that with God there is always hope for a brighter future. The book of Ruth was written sometime after 1010 B.C., since that was when David took the throne of Israel. It also refers to a "former time" in Israel, indicating it was written years after the actual events occurred. This book is placed between the Book of Judges and 1 Samuel and written as a biblical narrative.¹⁹ Michael Coogan describes its genre as "historical fiction, with a woman as protagonist." There is uncertainty as to the purpose of this book but it does highlight the mixed ancestry of David, whose lineage includes Jesus.²⁰ There is also uncertainty as to the time the book was written; the timeline could range from the tenth to the fourth century has been proposed. Regardless of the date or era in which the book was written, it is certain that it was written after the time of David and after the time of Judges; not only does the writer refer back to the time of the judges (1:1), but he explicitly refers to customs which were presumably followed in earlier times but had been altered or abandoned by the time of the writing (4:7).²¹

The narrative opens in Bethlehem which means "house of bread." This is ironic in that there is a famine. Naomi, as a faithful wife, follows Elimelech to the land of Moab because there is famine in the "house of bread." There seem to be some promise during a ten year time span. The sons, Mahlon and Chilion, find Moabite wives, but to these unions no children are born. Without warning, death takes all of the patriarchs of the family and leaves a family of women with uncertainty and no security for the family.

¹⁹ "Book of Ruth," accessed April 28, 2014, <http://christianity.about.com/od/oldtestamentbooks/a/Book-Of-Ruth.htm>.

²⁰ Michael Coogan, 226.

²¹ Ibid.

With no male protector, extinction of the family of women looms large. The text is silent on the reasons for the death of all the males of the household. It is important to note that Israel placed a “harsh social stigma on women with no children.”²² The fact is, these females are facing a bleak future and thus they bind together in love, commitment and loyalty to overcome obstacles that threaten their future. They endured the struggles together and shared in the triumphs having overcome threatened security of a comfortable future with no male to support them in a society when a woman was dependent upon a man for security.

The story of Ruth and Naomi exemplifies intense commitment between a mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, who formed a community of survival and support based on their loyalty to each other. The researcher contextualizes this story in the project. It is a story of family and commitment between two women as they learned to depend on each other when they were uncertain of their future. They were essentially alone and without obvious support as they journeyed together to an unknown future. The following quote describes the biblical foundation and best defines the named doctoral project for the researcher. “Nowhere in all of scripture is there a bond between two women. Amid the untimely demise of their husbands and in a foreign land, they through resiliency and determination overcame struggles and forged a bond of love and devotion that is unparalleled.”²³

²² Gillian M. Rowell, “Death, Destitution and Covenant,” in *The IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, Catherine Clark Kroeger and Mary J. Evans, eds.(Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 148.

²³ Women of Color Study Bible, 308.

This narrative is descriptive of a “rags to riches” theme in which they had nothing; but through their supportive cooperation, they became “rich” in the truest sense. They owned property; their future was secured and led to the lineage of Christ. There is an atmosphere of community and people (women) caring for each other. It moves from fragmentation to wholeness, emptiness to fullness, death to life, hunger to an abundance of food, exclusion to inclusion, barrenness to birthing, uncertainty to security and bitterness to rejoicing. The characters in this story pray for the blessings of God for each other. They take supportive actions toward the betterment of each. *The New Interpreter’s Bible* submits that the town of Bethlehem at the other end of the story can be viewed as a “peaceable village, a microcosm of the peaceable kingdom.”²⁴ The NIB also suggests questionable idyllic perspectives. Ruth has been portrayed as seeking her own selfish – interest and taking this opportunity to get away from Moab. This theory is also questionable to the researcher as to what wisdom is to be found in gambling with the uncertainty of a positive outcome. These women were not sure of what lay ahead on this journey which could only paint a bleak and possible hopeless picture of the future. They were not sure if they would be received by Naomi’s relatives, nor whether they would have ample provisions to survive. It has also been suggested that Ruth took advantage of Naomi and even disliked her. Boaz has been portrayed as having romantic and economic interests rather than being concerned for the welfare of Naomi and Ruth.²⁵ However, it is

²⁴ Katherine D. Sakenfeld, “The Overview of Ruth,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary*, Vol. 1, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and David Petersen, eds. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, Nashville, 2010), 183.

²⁵ Ibid.

the positive outcome of the story that provides the rationale for women coming together to journey together and overcome the obstacles that women face each day.

Ruth 1:8-18

The foundational text begins with verse 8 where Ruth tries to convince the widow daughters-in-law to go back to their mother's home. "Stay with your mothers" involves a rather surprising Hebrew expression referring to "the mother's house;" that is to say, each daughter-in-law was instructed to return to her mother's house, not to the home of her father, which one would normally expect (see, for example, Gen 38:11; Lev 22:13; Num. 30:16; Deut. 22:21; Judges 19:2, 3).²⁶ Even if a woman had rights to property, they in essence could not own it, but they could sell it along with themselves to the male owner.

Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, 'Sit here,' and they did so. ³ Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, 'Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you^{l1} will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.' (Ruth 4:2-5)

Women were little more than chattel to be used as a bargaining tool by their "owner."

The words spoken by Boaz in Chapter 4, vs. 5, makes this very clear... ⁵ "On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property" (vs. 8). Notice the

²⁶ J. de Waard and E. A. Nida, 11.

fact that Naomi encouraged the two women to return to their “mother’s house,” (not her father’s), though, according to Ruth 2:11, Ruth’s father at any rate was still living, but her mother’s house, because maternal love knows best how to comfort a daughter in her affliction. “Jehovah grant you that ye may find a resting-place, each one in the house of her husband,” i.e., that ye may both be happily married again.²⁷ Even in this ancient and patristic culture, women were given recognition for executing the gift God gave them of being mothers, the protectors and, yes, even providers. This indicates the impossibility of God’s people to continue the practice of marginalization of women. The bible supports the positive contribution women offer society. There has never been any real support that women are not critical to maintaining life and making positive contributions to the world. Naomi adds the critical part of women sharing and caring for each other: the much needed power of prayer.

As women in a caring and supporting community, prayer is the key ingredient. Verses 9-11 focus on the departures of the sisters-in-law, Ruth clinging to Naomi and Orpah returning home. Naomi was unable to dissuade Ruth, indicative of the strong bonds of commitment between the two women. Naomi’s attempts to dissuade the two women supports the theory of love and commitment between the women. Naomi could have made the long journey along and was not willing to risk the security of the future of the two women. In verse 11 one reads, “but Ruth clung to her as in Gen. 2:24), forsaking her father and mother to go with Naomi into the land of Judah. Naomi endeavored to

²⁷ C. F. Keil, and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Vol. 2 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 344-345.

dissuade them from this resolution by setting before them the fact, that if they went with her, there would be no hope of them being married again and enjoying the pleasures of life once more. “‘Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands?’ Her meaning is: I am not pregnant with sons, upon whom, as the younger brothers of Mahlon and Chilion, there would rest the obligation of marrying you, according to the Levirate law (Deut. 25:5; Gen. 38:8)”²⁸

Naomi supposes three cases in verse 12, of which each is more improbable, or rather more impossible, than the one before; and even if the impossible circumstance should be possible, that she should bear sons that very night, she could not in that case expect or advise her daughters-in-law to wait till these sons were grown up and could marry them, according to the Levirate law.

The text shows Naomi to be committed and loyal to her daughters-in-law. She presents them with the reality of not being able to assure them of a stable future where they would have husbands, as it was critical that women had a man to “cover” them or provide the protective security of a future. Naomi could not do anything herself to bring about such a connection and wished to confine herself therefore to the one point of making it clear to her daughters that in her present state it was altogether out of her power to provide connubial and domestic happiness for them in the land of Judah.²⁹ The love and commitment between these two women, who had otherwise been strangers, brought together through marriage, victimized by the fate of untimely death of the men in their

²⁸ Ibid., 346.

²⁹ Ibid.

lives, are powerful testaments to the success of women encouraging and sharing stories to overcome obstacles.

New Testament Foundation Text

⁴ Now he had to go through Samaria. ⁵ So he came to a town in Samaria called Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph. ⁶ Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. ⁷ When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" ⁸ (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) ⁹ The Samaritan woman said to him, "You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?" (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.) ¹⁰ Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water." ¹¹ "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?" ¹² Are you greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well and drank from it himself, as did also his sons and his livestock?" ¹³ ¹⁶ He told her, "Go, call your husband and come back." ¹⁷ "I have no husband," she replied. Jesus said to her, "You are right when you say you have no husband. ¹⁸ The fact is, you have had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have just said is quite true." ¹⁹ "Sir," the woman said, "I can see that you are a prophet. ²⁰ Our ancestors worshiped on this mountain, but you Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem." ²⁸ Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and said to the people, ²⁹ "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Messiah?" ³⁰ They came out of the town and made their way toward him. (John 4:4-20; 28-30)

Verses 4-6 indicate divine intervention or destiny for Jesus and the woman, "as the earthly journey of Jesus led through Samaria. The territory of Samaria was on the main ridge road between Judea and Galilee known as the ancient way of the patriarchs, which Josephus said took about three days to travel."³⁰ Though this was the shorter route, some Jews preferred the long route between the Jordan River to Jerusalem, noting inconvenience in the shorter route. Josephus rejected this claims by the Jews, noting

³⁰ G. L. Borchert, *John 1-11*, Vol. 25A (Nashville, TN: Boardman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 199.

“both routes could bring purity-oriented Jews into contact with those outside the covenant—Gentiles or Samaritans. It was not a comfortable choice, but some Jews probably would have chosen the Gentiles to the Samaritan rejects. Travel could always be a problem. The point was avoiding contact. In this story the focus is on contact with Samaritans — an issue clearly noted by the evangelist in the conversation of the woman with Jesus (4:9).³¹ Jesus initiates the conversation by asking the woman for a drink (v.7). In a culture which established the Samaritans as an inferior race, he took it a step farther by asking her, a woman, who was not to be spoken to in public settings and asked her for a drink, which is indicative of him stooping to her level. “The later [Rabbinical] tradition would not have allowed this. But at that time the separation may not have been so rigid, especially for Galileans, whose route of pilgrimage passed through Samaria. Besides, Jesus was above the divisions of the people.”³² “In truth we might well suppose that she was moved with a feeling of her unworthiness in the dignified presence. He unconsciously defies Himself on my pitcher; at least she hints at the difference between the man and the always less regarded woman.”³³ Scripture wholly ascertains Jesus’ mission and devotion to equality of humanity, a confirmation of the worth of all humanity. The Samaritan woman said to him, “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. How can you ask me for a drink?” (For Jews do not associate with Samaritans.)¹⁰ Jesus answered her, “If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks

³¹ Ibid.

³² J. P. Lange and P. Schaff, (2008). *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John* (p. 155). Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software.

³³ Ibid.

you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water (4:10).” He offers us all restoration to wholeness.

Jesus without bias offers living water, water in which she will never again have to thirst, rivers of water. It was very obvious that she was a Samaritan woman, yet he withheld judgment of her lifestyle as well as bias of sexism and classism. John’s mention of the hour of the day seems to refer particularly to this woman’s coming at such an hour. She also comes alone, no other women are with her, whereas oriental women like to go in companies to draw water for their homes. Piecing these observations together and joining them to what is revealed of this woman’s character, we may take it that she was a social outcast. The other women would not tolerate this woman who now lived in open adultery after a checkered career with five husbands. “The more must we marvel at the condescension of Jesus who stoops to ask a favor of such a woman, and this with a love that longs to save even her miserable soul.”³⁴

The above text is indicative of the fact that because of her lifestyle, as well as position in society, she has to be a lonely woman. The text does not provide information on the relationship surrounding the “man whom she had that was not her husband,” but apparently she had little support from him or she should hardly be the one whose duty was to “fetch” the water in the heat of the day.

“If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water” (v.10). In the most effective manner, Jesus uses the very refusal of this woman to make her the offer of the drink she so greatly needs. This offer contains a kindly rebuke for her ungracious refusal to extend

³⁴ Ibid.

so small a favor, coupled with the assurance of a far greater gift if she would ask of him.³⁵ Jesus wants to help all people, especially those who are outcast and broken (Luke 4:18). Jesus answered,

Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again,¹⁴ but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.¹⁵ The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water so that I won’t get thirsty and have to keep coming here to draw water.” John 4:14-15 (NIV)

Before he conditionally gives her the water, Jesus addresses her lifestyle. He got straight to the purpose he came for. He knew she was going to be at the well. This woman, who cannot go and call and bring her husband to Jesus, by that very fact is to see just what kind of a woman she is. What a wretched, sordid, immoral life she had led.

Yet some have thought that Jesus actually regarded this woman as one that was properly married and that he desired the presence of her husband. The fact that in the next breath, Jesus reveals that the woman’s whole past life is explained by supposing that suddenly between v. 16 and v. 17 God revealed these facts to Jesus. Thus in v. 16, Jesus speaks in ignorance and in v. 17, 18 with knowledge.³⁶

Jesus did not come to condemn for he already has knowledge of the past; he came to point people in the right direction (John 3:17). He wants to bring spiritual restoration to people’s lives. Once the woman is made aware of who Jesus is, she runs to tell her story. By sharing her story, a whole town is evangelized. By receiving the gift of Jesus,

³⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. John’s Gospel* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1961), 304.

³⁶ Ibid.

she is enriched and empowered and becomes an evangelist. This is only one of a handful of stories where women are treated in a manner that goes against the culture of that day.

Sabbath Liberation of a Woman

The bible is full of stories that indicate God's plan for equality among male and female. The New Testament text chosen by the researcher focused on Jesus and the Samaritan woman, which depicted a woman outcast by her local society because of her lifestyle. Jesus made a practice of openly ministering to women and making them whole. The Gospel of Luke shows that Jesus believed in the policy of inclusivity and equality of all, Gentiles, women, oppressed, marginalized and outcast. The culture during Jesus' time strongly promoted exclusivity of the above-mentioned classes of people. The story of the "bent woman" found in Luke 13:10-16 speaks volumes to the women found in the researcher's context; however, it speaks to the story of women in most of our churches.

¹⁰ On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching ... ¹¹ and a woman was there who had been crippled by a spirit for eighteen years. She was bent over and could not straighten up at all. ¹² When Jesus saw her, he called her forward and said to her, "Woman, you are set free from your infirmity." ¹³ Then he put his hands on her, and immediately she straightened up and praised God. ¹⁴ Indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, the synagogue leader said to the people, "There are six days for work. So come and be healed on those days, not on the Sabbath." ¹⁵ The Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Doesn't each of you on the Sabbath untie your ox or donkey from the stall and lead it out to give it water?" ¹⁶

Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her? On a Sabbath Jesus was teaching in one of the synagogues. This is the last incident in which Luke referred to Jesus' teaching in a synagogue. The woman is described as having an evil spirit that caused her crippled condition. She was "bent" and could not straighten up at

all.³⁷ One would assume this was a permanent posture for the woman. That is a major fault for Christians. Their personal assumptions lead nowhere. We have to be reliant upon our God-given gifts through the Holy Spirit to be effective in our ministry. Additional reference to the phrase, “at all” can be interpreted as modifying “could not” (“could not at all straighten up”) or “straighten up” (“could not straighten up at all”). Upon seeing her, Jesus was moved with compassion. No request was made of Jesus. His compassion instigated the healing. This further confirms that teaching others of the goodness of God and leading them to a spiritual environment can bring about healing. Jesus put his hand on her and she was healed immediately (v.13). Jesus wants us to be healed. In contrast to eighteen years of sickness, the woman’s healing was instantaneous and she praised God.³⁸ When transformed lives of those whose hope is restored through living self-sufficient lives, God is glorified.

The hostility of the synagogue leaders as they raged against the healing of the woman on the Sabbath is still present today. “They are willing for the farm animals to be released from their stalls to get water or rescued from a ditch, but loudly cry out against a woman who has been bound for eighteen years. Jesus addresses her as the ‘daughter of Abraham’ (v.16). Jesus referring to the woman as the daughter of Abraham gave her a sense of worth and dignity in the kingdom of God.”³⁹ Jesus’ opponents deemed this woman unworthy of healing on the Sabbath, but Jesus quickly reminds them that they are

³⁷ R. H. Stein, (1992). *Vol. 24: Luke. The New American Commentary* (373) Logos Bible Software.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Clark & Kroeger, *IVP Women’s Bible Commentary*, 577.

willing to loose (*lyo*) “tethers of the livestock and lead them to the water but found the woman unworthy.”⁴⁰ *The New Interpreters’ Bible* states, “The contrasting reactions to the event speak volumes: the healed woman praises God and the crowd rejoices, while Jesus’ critics are ‘put to shame’ (v.17). God’s people are being restored, and at the same time divided, by Jesus’ ministry.”⁴¹ *The New International Greek Testament Commentary* sheds further light on the incident. Having established his ruling, Jesus draws a conclusion, *a minore*: what is right for cattle is all the more right for man; cf. 14:5; Mt. 12:11. The force of the argument, however, has been contested. Montefiore asked why the crippled woman could not wait another day to be healed. As Montefiore asks this question, it would seem to me that his priorities are skewed as are some of the leaders today. Her need was not as great as that of thirsty cattle. The objection is trivial. For Jesus, although she is a woman (and therefore regarded as less important than men in Jewish thought), she is nevertheless a descendant of Abraham (cf. 1:55), and like Zaccheus (19:9) a member of God’s people (Acts 13:26). It may be that the Jews denied her this position since her illness might have been regarded as a sign of sinfulness (cf. 13:2), but Jesus affirms it. She ought, therefore, to be freed from an alien master who had kept her bound for eighteen years. She should not remain bound a moment longer, for look, she has already suffered eighteen years.⁴²

According to Heidi Torgerson, the episode of healing the bent woman is illustrative of one way God’s rule is made manifest among his people. Luke’s story

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Beverly Roberts Gaventa, “Sabbath Liberation of a Woman,” in *New Interpreter Bible, One Volume Commentary*, John P. Carroll, ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2010), 698.

⁴² I Howard Marshall, “The Gospel of Luke,” in *New International Greek Testament Commentary*, Logos Bible Software.

demonstrates “two Lukan themes: Mercy is the basis for interpreting the law, and the lowly are raised and the mighty are brought down.”⁴³ Jesus demonstrated that “the law is only valid when understood through the lens of merciful action that serves the needs of the poor, the sick and infirm.”⁴⁴ It is significant that the liberation of the bent woman took place in the synagogue on the Sabbath, the day commemorating the Jubilee in which all debts are to be forgiven and “all slaves freed.” When Jesus calls the woman “daughter of Abraham,” she is restored to her rightful place in the community of promise. “He essentially names her share in the blessings of Abraham and binds her “forever to God’s faithful promises.”⁴⁵ Jesus silenced his detractors by saying he was freeing her from her bondage of affliction, saying if the cattle are loosed on the Sabbath for a drink of water, then how much more so was this daughter of Abraham deserving to be freed. This tied God’s mercy to the covenant of Abraham, placing mercy above holiness. The woman is not only freed from weakness, but Jesus becomes her advocate by publicly defending her to the synagogue leader who suggested that her healing on the Sabbath has broken the law (v.16). Jesus also engages in conversation which means that the woman is doubly lifted up and her opponents are brought to public shame by exposing their hypocrisy and calling them by the name: “hypocrites” (v.17).

Kroeger and Evans list possible illnesses that may have caused this woman to be unable to stand in an upright position: *spondylitis anklylopoietica* (inflammation of the joints in the spine) or severe osteoporosis. Further quoting Kroeger and Evans,

⁴³ Heidi Torgerson, *Healing of the Bent Woman* (June 2005), (p.177), (EBSCO).

⁴⁴ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 181.

“Marginalized women are objects of consistent concern to Jesus.” Without a request from the woman, “Woman, you are set free from you ailment.”⁴⁶ The woman, a Jew, though marginalized, obviously knew healing on the Sabbath would be breaking the “law.” She had been “bent” for eighteen years; her prayers had been unanswered; yet, she remained faithful in synagogue worship. Her condition was not the result of “any misdemeanor on her part, but rather was due to the malice of Satan.” As a liberated member of the covenant community, she may now stand erect and look people in the face. Those who must hide their faces in shame are they who would deny her this right.⁴⁷ The preceding statement can be applied to women in many churches today. They suffer in silence for fear of breaking the rules and going against the doctrinal practices of male dominance. The pericope of text above reveals a theological process here which might cause one to ask the following question: “Why in this context was it necessary for Jesus to heal the woman on the Sabbath?” The *New International Greek Testament Commentary* states it was necessary for her to be released immediately, even though it was the Sabbath, perhaps indeed all the more fitting on the Sabbath, since Satan evidently does not stop his work on the Sabbath; in this way the Sabbath is positively hallowed (cf. Grundmann, 280).⁴⁸ There is a similar Sabbath healing found in Luke 14:1 in which the leaders of the synagogue took issue with Jesus “healing on the Sabbath.” In the Luke 13 text, Jesus called them out for their hypocrisy (v. 15). Jesus relates the physical disorder of the woman to the work of Satan. “Such affliction conflicts with God’s purpose of salvation in

⁴⁶ Kroeger & Evans. 576.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 577.

⁴⁸ I. Howard Marshall, “The Gospel of Luke,” in *New International Greek Testament Commentary: “The Gospel of Luke.”* Logos Bible Software.

his covenant with Abraham and are the concerns of Jesus' ministry (Lk 4:18)."⁴⁹ There is a description of Jesus' mission as he comes on the scene and announces it in his "inaugural address" in Luke 4:18. His mission is directed to the poor, the bound, blind and oppressed. Jesus was radical in breaking of Sabbath laws by healing and casting out demons even on the Sabbath. There are many "bent" women attending worship service Sunday after Sunday, Wednesday bible study and other worship events. This text is a key component of the ministry of the proposed project in this paper. The mission of the project is to bring healing and wholeness, restoration and hope, spiritual and emotional support, and provision of needed resources for sustainability to those in need.

Historical Foundation

Throughout history, women have been marginalized and subjugated due to the dominance of patriarchy. In spite of this type of maltreatment women existing under this male dominant system have been resilient and creative in ways, not only to survive, but to make amazing and significant contributions to history. Though their voices have been muted, their deeds cannot go unrecognized. Women are gifted with an innate sense of family and community and tend to come together with natural wisdom and be creative in means of survival, while yet withstanding amazing tales of suffering. When given the opportunity to share in a supportive and trusted environment, amazing deeds are accomplished. Sharing of stories speak healing to those who are troubled or burdened with pain and suffering.

⁴⁹ Michael Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, NT, 124.

Though oppression of females has been prevalent beginning in the bible, there is no biblical documentation to support God's approval of this type of dominion of one human over another. At the very onset of the Creation story, the theme is built around family, man and woman coming together to create a community.

Scripture advocates for family and community. God said it is not good for "man to be alone." God's command to Adam and Eve is as follows: "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground everything that has the breath of life in it, I give every green plant for food" (Gen. 2:28-30).

The overlying message of the bible to God's people is love, justice and mercy. Beginning with the commissioning of Moses to speak out against "the Egyptian social order,"⁵⁰ God has commissioned and empowered God's prophets to speak out against injustice, oppression and social inequality.

During the eighth century B.C. there was great prosperity among the Israelites. However, there was a serious gap between the rich and the poor. The rich prospered and the poor suffered. God did not forget the poor and oppressed; thus, God raised up the eight-century prophets -- Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, Amos -- and empowered them with the message of moral and political judgment against the perpetrators of political oppression, social inequality and injustice.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Obery Hendricks, Jr., *The Politics of Jesus* (New York, NY: Double Day Publisher, 2006), 28.

The late and famous W.E.B. Dubois, puts it in proper perspective: "As I look about me today in this veiled world of mine, despite the noisier and more spectacular advance of my brothers, I instinctively feel and know that it is the five million women of my race who really count. Black Women (and women whose grandmothers were black) are...the main pillars of those social settlements which we call churches; and they have small doubt raised three-fourths of our church property." (*Darkwater*, 1918)⁵²

The community of faith in this case, the black church as in the contextual setting of this project, has been the most powerful agency available in the history of black America in the fight against the oppressive vehicle of racism and other forms of injustice. The social injustices perpetrated against black women are multidimensional. They continue to wage eternal war against white America as well as their white sister only to beat back by the fathers and husbands of prevailing patriarchy of the church. If it were not such a stark reality, it would seem highly unthinkable that black women endure subjugation in the black church. Women have been the agency in which the church has survived.

God continues to equip the church with a unique milieu in which excellence in individual talents can be useful and recognition can be given that otherwise those obsessed with power might make seem irrelevant. Though the church has demonstrated the love of Jesus through provisions of food pantries, clothing drives, feeding the hungry, financial assistance, etc., the concern of the researcher is that in the local context (St. Luke) there are limited resources and lack of hands-on ministry for those who suffer from

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 1.

domestic abuse and other injustices. This historical foundation provides the backdrop of history which will relate to the sin of social injustice. It will provide the historical foundation and rationale of the focus group, “Prophetic Preaching and Praxis,” led by Drs. Robert Walker and Kenneth Cummings.

History of Marginalization

The Old Testament narrative regarding God’s chosen (Israel) challenges its reader to immerse themselves between storytelling (narrative) and poetry (song), yet not to rely on rigid adherence to Israel’s history. Interwoven in the excellent scholarship of the publication, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, authors, Bruce C. Birch, et al., highlights the importance of one’s own theological assessment based on one’s lived experience, faith and knowledge of the scripture, which moves back and forth from metaphors to actual historical events. The final theory is based on the theological evaluation and assessment of the reader.⁵³

Women in the Life Span of Jesus

Through researching the history of marginalized women, this writer has concluded that Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the most prominent and celebrated woman in the life of Jesus. Present today is the veneration of Mary in the Catholic Church. Mary came from very humble beginnings, born into the marginalized of that era. She was from Nazareth in Galilee, a rural town of about 500 inhabitants.⁵⁴ Elza Tamez makes a very

⁵³ Bruce C. Birch, et al., *Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 8.

⁵⁴ Elza Tamez, *Jesus and Courageous Women* (New York, NY: Global Ministries, 2001), 14.

significant observation. God could have chosen any woman from the elite priesthood or other renowned and elevated persons of that era and area. Yet, God chose Mary, a “humble peasant woman of unknown lineage, who lived in an insignificant village.”⁵⁵ After it was confirmed to Mary that she would be the mother to the Savior of the world, Mary broke out into a hymn of praise, *The Magnificat*, through which she testifies that the generations would call her blessed. She remembered the mercy of God toward the “poor, lowly and hungry.”⁵⁶ This is a testament of the fact that Jesus came in support of the marginalized and the oppressed. Mary’s place in history is unique with regards to any other woman ever created. She carried the Savior of the world for nine months and nurtured him into independence. Mary knew her son came to be the savior of the world; yet, she endured and shared in his suffering as she watched his tortuous execution. His life was given as a sacrifice so that all may have eternal life. The bible is silent on the eventual outcome of Mary, but I feel her suffering was second to that of Jesus as she witnessed the execution of her son. Yet, she has the exalted place in human history that no one else can share. During Masters’ studies at UTS, the writer was allowed the opportunity to travel to Turkey and see the location of Mary’s church (the mother of Jesus). No other information was forthcoming.

The bible records Mary Magdalene as a devout follower of Christ who also watched as her friend was crucified and die a cruel and painful death. Mary Magdalene, whose former life was that of alleged ill repute, came on the scene as a marginalized woman. The story is told that Jesus had cast seven demons out of her which meant she was a very sick woman. Because of these demons, she had lost her dignity and her sense of belonging. Jesus loved her still.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

Tamez states Mary Magdalene “needed to return to herself.”⁵⁷ In fact, Elsa Tamez refers to her as the “most important woman disciple in the movement of Jesus.” In all the Gospel stories of the resurrection, her name is mentioned first (Mk. 16:1-11; Mt. 28:1; Lk. 24:10: 11-18). Jesus appeared to her before any of the other disciples (man or woman).⁵⁸ It appears that she was the leader of the women who dared in fear to seek the body of Jesus for proper burial. The Gospel of Luke records the interaction and impact Jesus had on many women. He entrusted her with the precious gift of the gospel as the men were in hiding after being traumatized by Jesus’ crucifixion. It is important to note that it was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of Jesus and the few women in the movement of Jesus “who dared to go to the tomb” experienced an epiphany while the rest of the men and women hid in fear. God uses those who avail themselves.

There are many women to whom Jesus had personal interaction in his life span. Specifically, Luke 13:10-17 records the story of the bent woman in the synagogue. Bound by a demonic spirit for eighteen years, she had an ailment rendering her unable to stand up straight. Jesus restored her to wholeness. Modern day theologians, male and female, have made it easier for one to find and appreciate similarities in one’s own life and/or lived experience/community. The knowledge of social trends and customs and the relationships of the characters of the Old Testament stories illuminates the human landscape of experience in which people can see themselves, families, and friends and know the truth of God living within all humanity. These commonalities are not only

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 73

found in biblical narrative but in the overall big picture stemming from one's faith. The reality of God cannot be disclosed, past or present, apart from the boldness of those that speak that reality into the realm of their own experience.⁵⁹

Initially, scholastic interpreters of the bible were men who were products of a patriarchal society. Israel's history was plagued with daily events that were dangerous and demanding. Sometimes whole groups of people could be wiped out in war and other violent attacks on the people of Israel. When considering the calamities that demanded the physical strength, wisdom, and fortitude of the men, much of the information regarding the contribution of women were omitted from the Israel's history. The researcher feels that this is partly due to the lack of female scholars and writers and much of this information was written based on the interpretation and "lived experience" of the male writers. In the past several decades, biblical scholarship has produced an awareness of the social context of biblical reading and interpretation.⁶⁰ Research proves the continuing trend of female theological scholarship. Womanist and feminist theologians continue to pave the way for women whose voices have otherwise been silenced.

In recent history, female scholars are bringing new perspectives with new details to the front, which were previously underplayed or possibly unnoticed. The few women in the bible are being seen to have valid but different experiences with the God of Israel and their stories are slowly taking form. Through the endless "begats" found in Matthew 1, where only men are named, women are noted for their role in nurturing God's chosen.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 76.

⁶⁰ Ibid, 11.

With Jesus, women truly come into their own, although still only noteworthy in relation to a man.

Reading the Old Testament with an eye to status and class, one sees that through the many generations that all aspects are represented. A powerful and wealthy Israel, of great material resources, were protected by “Temple Priests” who intervened on the behalf to Yahweh. However, they failed to obey Yahweh’s command, “Love mercy, do justly and walk humbly with the Lord” (Micah 6:8). They exploited the poor through political oppression and injustice. The women were marginalized and had no voice. Women were not even included in the count of the 600,000 of the Exodus. The very obvious and significant roles of women were omitted in this text. They bore the nation of Israel in their wombs, tended and nurtured it to independence.

Women in the Bronze Age

A web site resource on the treatment and status enjoyed by women during the period of Sumerian civilization (2355-2000 BC) revealed that women underwent somewhat of a social upgrade during this period of the Bronze Age. Although they did not enjoy the privileges of today, their significance and contributions to culture were recognized and held in high regards. Female mothers were regarded as priestesses while the slaves of the household were also female. Though men dominated society, women still enjoyed the privilege of favored position. Parents could give their daughter in marriage; however, women were granted the privilege of refusal to accept this arrangement without the threat of punishment. This all changed during the era of Hammurabi (ca 1700). During this period, males had absolute control and women could

be put to death for acting on privileges she formerly enjoyed by refusing to take a husband or kill an adulterous wife. Women participated in various occupations such as potters, weavers, spinners, hairdressers, agricultural workers, barmaids, brewers, cooks, bakers, etc. Their wages were paid in kind, but generally were lower than those of men.⁶¹

Women in the Patristic Age.

Marginalization of women began in the bible with the Fall of Man. Eve has been blamed for Adam's sin – even Adam attempted to lay the blame when questioned by God “The Woman you put here with me...” Gen.3:12 (NIV). Genesis gives the first biblical incident of marginalization and is demonstrated in the story of Abraham, Sarah and Hagar (Gen. 12:10-20). The story of Hagar took place during the late Bronze Age (the age in which that culture began to use bronze, smelting copper and tin)⁶² between 2000 and 1550 BC, corresponding to the Middle Kingdom period in Egyptian history.⁶³

The historical era of the early church includes the years between 100-1054 AD.⁶⁴ It is fitting that one would examine the origins of the patriarchy of the early church and the Church Fathers, (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Augustine, Tertullian, Aquinas and Origen) and assess the role they played in the subordination and marginalization of women. These noted theologians were in agreement on the doctrine of sinfulness being an inescapable

⁶¹ Christian Leadership Center, accessed November 27, 2013, <http://www.christianleadershipcenter.org/women5.htm>.

⁶² Ancient.eu.com, accessed November 27, 2013, http://www.ancient.eu.com/Bronze_Age.

⁶³ Women in the Bible, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.womeninthebible.net/1.2.Hagar.htm>.

⁶⁴ Mariedenazareth, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.mariedenazareth.com/2193.0.html?&L=1>.

part of humankind's make-up. The blame was laid at the feet of Eve for luring Adam into the temptation. As a result, women have been branded 'Eve, the devil's gateway.'⁶⁵

Thomas Aquinas was bold in his negative view of women with statements as follows:

"Good order would have been wanting in the human family if some were not governed by others wiser than themselves. So by such a kind of subjection woman is naturally subject to man, because in man the discretion of reason predominates."⁶⁶

As recent as 1996, a study entitled, "Power and Control of Women in Patriarchal Society" and "Women Created in God's Image as Equal to Men" reveal some interesting points. These studies revealed:

most biblical texts reflect favorably on women's equality to men. Specifically, there were 73 positive texts compared to 26 negative texts. In addition, of the 73 positive texts, 50 are found in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts, written by the author of the Book of Luke. Thus, 68% of the positive texts relating to women were found in the "words and actions of Jesus."⁶⁷

Historical quotations of "several influential church fathers" corresponded with "physical and sexual violence, which was associated with power and control advocated by the Church fathers."⁶⁸ When the dignity and integrity of one human being to another is attacked, the "other" is "sinned against." It seems very clear that Jesus came for those who are sinned against – the oppressed. One could safely conclude that the church fathers

⁶⁵ Andrew Sung Park and Susan Nelson, *The Other Side of Sin* (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 2001), 3.

⁶⁶ St. Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Theologica, I" q.92 a.1 reply 2., accessed June 14, 2014, <http://www.sacred-text.com>.

⁶⁷ Jeri Gray-Reneberg, "Domestic Violence: Focus Guide for Clergy and Religious Leaders," Family Violence Council of Lincoln/Lancaster County and the Lincoln-Lancaster County Health Department, 1996, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://www.angelfire.com>.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

were very influential in impacting the negative views which led to subjugation of women in the early Church, who indeed “systematized Christian theology.”⁶⁹

Gillian Cloke, in her publication *This Female Man of God*, explains how the attitudes of the church fathers impacted the status of women in the early church. She referenced the Apostle Paul, citing his influence in the subordination. She states, “Patristic attitudes take their root, though adopted in varying degrees, in the writings of the Apostle Paul; for them the first and greatest Christian writer.”⁷⁰ She further states, “The fathers also saw women being essentially vain, sinful, inconstant, deceitful, and more liable to temptation.”⁷¹

Since the early church favored patriarchy based on the beliefs of the church fathers, it is fitting that vindication should begin with the church providing support systems in which women can be educated, mentored and enlightened with regards to those who are victims of domestic violence, human trafficking and incest. These are only a few of the problems that lead to attack on the dignity and integrity of women. The researcher chose her home contextual settings as it practices doctrinal patrimony which may result in marginalization of women. Establishing a women’s ministry such as the one described in the abstract and description of this project would provide a ministry which would help to alleviate some of the pain and suffering of women who have been victimized by social injustice. Restitution of dignity, restoring hope and healing of women, who have been broken by a dominant system of evil which began in the early

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Gillian Cloke, *This Female Man of God* (New York, NY: Routledge Printing, 1995), 25.

⁷¹ Ibid., 27.

church laying the blame on the woman for “provoking lust,” would have a major impact on the righting a situation that has been wrong for so long.⁷²

Women in the Medieval/Middle Ages

The Medieval period began in the 5th century AD and extended until the 15th century AD, when the control of the Roman Empire ended.⁷³ This period has limited threads of women in history as there has been much debate about the woman’s place. The first three centuries were filled with controversy and debates regarding the woman’s role and were often declared as heretical.⁷⁴ The Patristic age was followed by a time when the minds relegated to the abbeys and monasteries began to bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit. The church had kept the light of knowledge alive which reveals women have not always been viewed in a negative light and have made significant contributions to history. Feminists explored religious women, women preachers and even the witch craze.⁷⁵ The medieval age was blessed with the contribution of many spiritual and highly intellectual women who made notable contributions to history, especially the church. Women were still subjugated in the Middle Ages but in the latter Middle Ages, women “rose in men’s esteem” as in the “spreading of the cult of the Virgin Mary” as Mary was seen as the “ideal woman.” Women were transformed from Eve the sinner to Mary the Redeemer.

⁷² Ibid., 28.

⁷³ Medievalplus.com, accessed September 20, 2013, <http://www.medievalplus.com/medieval-history>.

⁷⁴ E. Fahlbusch, & Bromiley, G. W. (1999–2003), In *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* Grand Rapids, MI; Leiden, Netherlands: Wm. B. Eerdmans; Brill. Logos Bible Software.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

Many women chose to dedicate themselves to the church by becoming nuns.⁷⁶ The aforementioned paints a portrait of the brighter side of life of women in the Medieval age as some women progressed to the positions of theologians and mystics; notably, “Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), Hadewijch of Antwerp (13th century), Beatrice of Nazareth (1200–1268), Mechthild of Magdeburg (ca. 1210-97), Margaret Porette (1310), Julian of Norwich (ca. 1342-after 1416), as well as the 20th-century women who attended the Second Vatican Council.”⁷⁷ The fight for women continued through the 19th century threading its way through the 20th century until present. The positive change in the lives of these women was the mere fact that they were allowed to exercise their choice to live committed lives of spirituality where they were free to exercise their spiritual gifts in ministry. These noted women of the Middle Ages marked the favorable and positive change in respect and dignity given to the women of that age; albeit, these were gifted women of deep spiritual commitment. These women chose lives as Beguines and dedicated their lives to serving others.⁷⁸

Alternatively, an online historical site reveals that women were defined by the men in their lives, the church and local government. “Any man in the family could order a woman to do as he wished. If a woman refused, she was beaten into submission, as disobedience was considered a crime against God.” While her life was dominated by the men in her life, it appeared that as long she was obedient she was treated well.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ozedweb.com, accessed September 5, 2013, http://www.ozedweb.com/history/middle_ages_women_in_religion.htm.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Amy Oden, *In Her Words* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994), 35-40.

Global Aspects of Marginalization of Women.

Mohja Kahf wrote a review essay on *Western Representations of the Muslim Woman: From Termagant to Odalisque*. This review contrasts the images of Muslim women set forth by European writers of the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries with the realities of the lives of their Christian counterparts. Kahf takes the time to flesh out the social climates of then France, England, Italy and Spain to foster an understanding of the intellectual processes which fostered the accepted images of Muslims in these countries at the time. Kahf's goal is to take away the attempt to objectify the Muslim woman representing the romantic image of the Muslim woman as pampered sex objects representative of the Western text and turn them into live female humans of flesh and blood, beginning with three periods: Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment/Romantic.⁸⁰

It was believed that Muslim women lived pampered but isolated lives with little purpose other than to please men. The image of the veiled, silent woman living out her days cloistered away from society was mysterious and sensual and caught the imaginations of European women and men alike. Some of the earliest writings were factual, stemming from the writer's actual dealings. She noted the writings of John of Damascus (d.749), who wrote based on his personal encounters with Muslims, claiming Islam to be an idolatrous worship of a false prophet, working out his doctrine under the tutelage, taken from biblical sources, of an Arian monk.⁸¹ Damascus' dealings with the

⁷⁹ Medievality.com, accessed September 6, 2013, <http://www.medievality.com/medieval-women.html>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Mohja Kahf, *Western Representation of Muslim Women* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1999), 207.

Muslims took place in the Spanish Umayyad court. He treated religious and everyday life from a condescending viewpoint of both. Subsequent writers gave more fanciful accounts taking liberties with facts, in an attempt to bolster Christianity's image, which was not the major force in Europe that it is today. Thus, the idleness of European women was given over to righteous Christian endeavors, raising the family, tending the hearth, etc., whereas the idle Muslim woman was seen to spend much time bathing and applying cosmetics, tended by slaves, and awaiting her master's summons. The harsh reality was that both the Eastern and Western woman were cogs in powerful patriarchal systems where both were little more than chattel, bound in loveless marriages to men who controlled every aspect of their lives. A woman alone in either society, unless wealthy and having powerful family connections, was looked down upon and pitied. Though there were notable exceptions on both sides, there were more similarities than differences.⁸²

Alternatively speaking, a transcultural trip to Turkey in 2010 revealed to this writer women who were free to practice the freedom and dress style of her Western counterpart. These women walked the streets of Istanbul fully attired in fashionable trends of the West. They were also noted to maintain employment in public settings of customer service agents at hotels, restaurants, entrepreneurs, retail and other means of livelihood enjoyed by the Western woman.

Marginalization of Women in Latin America: 15th Century to Present

The biblical story of Rahab portrays prostitutes as the "marginalized of the marginalized;" however, the Old Testament story of Naomi and Ruth contextualizes the

⁸² Ibid.

project as it focuses on women forming communities of trust in which they can provide support for each other in dealing with the challenging issues that many women encounter just through merely being female. Rahab's story is relevant to some of the targeted women. While prostitution is not the focus of the project, as mentioned before, it serves as the paradigm and captures the epitome of the resources women have turned to throughout history as a means of survival and provision for their families. Prostitution is especially highlighted in Latin America women where it is noted that a large percentage of these women have undergone transgenerational suffering and marginalization. This time span included the colonial times when the Spaniards forced the Indian population to migrate from their land of origin as it was found to be rich with oil and gold. The abuse of women was intense as they were considered to be of even less value than male Indians.

Brenda Consuelo Ruiz looked at more than 500 years of suffering (beginning in the fifteenth centuries) of the Indian women who were considered men's property; the main appreciation was the role of bringing forth children.⁸³ These women endured repeated rapes by the masses and were abused in every way possible. A new race was born as the women endured the continued rape and fatherless children resulting from the abandonment of the mothers as the father would not claim the children. Women had no choice but to become heads of the family and sole providers. The families were threatened by the continual migration and the women would bind together to maintain the community that was threatened. Thus, the women would provide assistance in an effort to maintain financial security by accompanying the men in various types of jobs, which

⁸³ Brenda Consuelo Ruiz, *Missiological Priorities for the Church in Latin America Today* (163), accessed May 22, 2013, <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1758-6631.1991.tb02268.x/abstract>.

included prostitution when necessary. The women were exploited as workers, but recognized that by staying together, families were more likely to survive.

This suffering brought about both negative and positive impacts. The impact led them to believe that suffering was the only fate of life. The positive effect was it helped them to become stronger because they possessed and held on to a deep faith in God. Their faith in God was a means of survival. God became the father they never met and also filled the void for a mother who cared for them. They believe wholeheartedly that God would meet their every need and everything that happened was a result of God's will. Church was the sustaining vehicle that helped them to provide for their material and spiritual needs. It helped them to maintain mental stability. It helped to diminish their sense of marginalization that stemmed from the increased poverty. Deep spirituality is the driving force in what makes the Protestant church of Nicaragua 85 to 90% female.⁸⁴ The females of this community seem to be the backbone for survival. The Nicaraguan women continue to suffer this underserved abuse. Many did not survive. Many are still being killed in their own homes for lack of basic medical attention as well as illegal abortions.⁸⁵ Ruiz shared this study of biblical women in relation to their own situations. They identified with Hagar, whose son faced death from thirst and hunger; Ruth, who lost her husband and her sons and Tamar, victim of incest. Role playing of these biblical women has proven to be therapeutic and enlightening. Workshops have proven to be a valuable tool in helping to enhance their self-esteem.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Ibid.. 163-164.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

When pastoral theology is employed in the rehabilitation of the marginalized, positive change takes place. In a comment made by Susan Brooks Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary, she testifies that when pastoral theology is employed in response to the prostitute, “even the liberation church *listens* to prostitutes.”⁸⁷ This supports the claim that the church has a responsibility to minister to the prostitute. The motivation for this type of ministry for all socially disadvantaged, including marginalized women, (including prostitutes), is fueled by the desire for social justice for all. This writer is a member of an established Christian community; as such, she believes that ecclesial leaders or representatives of the church should take an interest in the pastoral/temporal care of the disadvantaged. This ministry could provide rehabilitation for the prostitute, utilizing pastoral theology.

Margaret Eletta Guider undertook the task of a 500-year research history (beginning with the colonial period through the twentieth century) which revealed that the Brazilian church, after concerted efforts and public attention to the prostitutes, had a noted increase in consciousness with regard to prostitutes, addressing the prostitutes as marginalized women, and determining them to be victims rather than sinners.⁸⁸ Rahab, the prostitute has been labeled “as an exemplar of faith”⁸⁹ Only through the eyes of pastoral theology can this claim be made. The church should look at the “whys” of women who make “bad choices” or have been forced into “human slavery” because of lack of employment, abandonment, coercion, etc., ending up in unfavorable lifestyles and

⁸⁷ Margaret Eletta Guider, *Daughters of Rahab* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), back cover.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

being viewed as unsavory characters. This supports the claim that through pastoral counseling, training and mentoring, the church can and should provide such support to the disadvantaged and abused woman as it enhances self-image.

In an article in the *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, Leah Coulter used a term to describe a common form of abuse of women -- sexual abuse --which often takes place in the church. She described it as *sanctuary trauma*. I agree with Leah Coulter that a sanctuary is supposed to be a “place of refuge and protection” but sometimes it has been a place of trauma, and individuals who have suffered previous trauma run to the church for protection are further wounded in what they had felt to be a safe haven.⁹⁰ A discussion with a female doctoral colleague revealed that her project dealt with the trauma suffered by women who seek help from the church only to suffer victimization and bondage as mistresses to church leaders. Pastoral theology, teaching and preaching of the word in collaboration with the Holy Spirit empowers the victims to learn to trust through faith in the Almighty God.

Women in the Twenty-First Century Black Church.

Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, author of *If It Wasn't for the Women*, highlights contributions black women have made to the black church and the community as a whole. Gilkes, a womanist theologian, examined the roles and treatment of women in the twenty-first century black church. She examines the ways which black women have helped to shape the culture of the black church. While making significant contributions in a wide range of diverse tasks in the fight against racism, the fight is multidimensional in that they have to battle gender-oppression and classism in their own church. They work outside the homes, sometimes being the sole support and head of their households. They

⁹⁰ APA, Coulter, Leah (2001) *American Journal of Pastoral Counseling*, 3 (3-4), 188.

are expected to be good managers while they “participate in the struggles between the communities and the dominant society.”⁹¹ Gilkes also noted the black woman’s historical contributions to the community in their activities which empowered the community to survive, grow and advance in a hostile society, noting that these women are the basic elements of community, which they re-create and sustain, which is a mutually reinforcing process.⁹² Historically speaking, one of the most significant impacts women have had on the church is the financial support they provide for their husbands as they pursued higher education in preparation for ministry, sustaining the family financially and raising the children in sometimes extended absence from the home. Generally speaking, the nucleus of the family is maintained through the ongoing presence and management of women.

The contributions of African-American women in the work force cannot be separated from their contributions to their work in the church. They have historically received the worst treatment (sexual exploitation, coercion, threats of violence) and the lowest pay. Through a sisterhood that offered mutual support and emotional security, black women have been, and are a force to be reckoned with. Until recently, they have been excluded from positions of authority and power in the black Baptist church; yet, they are still sought out by politicians at election time because the solidarity they exhibit across social and economic times that tend to separate white populations gives them a powerful voice that must be heeded by anyone in their community seeking positions in the political arena.

⁹¹ Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, 16.

⁹² Ibid., 17.

Beginning with the early church, there has always been the controversial issue regarding the woman's place in the church. The last ten years of the twentieth century have been the worst for African-American women. Nevertheless, in spite of misery and suffering of slavery and the assault of and "wholesale terror" of the Jim Crow era, men and women revealed a unity of purpose and a sense of shared suffering which helped to mediate the conflicts between men and women. Yet, the black male pastors and others falsely believe that women are now faring better than men in their communities. Further, because of this belief by African-American males, ministry remains the only area in which black men have access to influence and authority. This has resulted in the continued and fierce resistance to women in ministry, and even more, resistance to women's ordination. In 2000, Vashti McKenzie was the first woman elected as bishop in the African-Methodist Episcopal Church. It is interesting to note that ironically, "the denominations most associated with upper and middle class white people or with poor and marginalized black people in the United States have provided the greatest access to ecclesiastical authority for black women."⁹³ Gilkes made an interesting note that the black community is sitting on the edge of destruction, politically, economically, and culturally, impoverished and experiencing relentless economic genocide. It is imperative that the African American church or religious institution provide "internal ministries" that addresses the needs of those who are suffering at the same time it projects an uncompromising prophetic force outward that demands and effects significant social, economic, political and cultural change."⁹⁴ The historical impact that African-American

⁹³ Ibid., 210.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 211.

women have had on the United States culture and society cannot be denied.⁹⁵ Gilkes noted the contributions of Harriet Tubman, who in 1866, became the first woman to lead “United States soldiers in battle.” In praise for her exploits, a writer made the following observation: “The desperation of a poor black woman has power to shake a nation that so long was deaf to her cries.”⁹⁶ If it were not for the women, the foundation of the black church would have remained a weakened structure, sorely lacking the organizational and administrative skills of the female member. Yet, historically, what has evolved is a paradox: Women are founding organizations and have become stabilizing powers, whose voices, until recently, have been silenced in authority and policy-making.

Women such as Vashti McKenzie, author and first female bishop in the history of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AMEC), are among many African-American women who have overcome bias and subjugation in the church. Other women have endured rape, incest, domestic violence, and other forms of marginalization to make positive and powerful contributions to society, especially black women. Among the great contributions to our culture and race are women such as Oprah Winfrey and the late Linda Hollies, minister and author.

Jarena Lee was not a product of the 20th and 21st century, but she should be noted among noted pioneers in the ministry of women. Rev. Lee was born at the end of the 19th century (February 11, 1883), and with much self-sacrifice and discomfort, she earned her rightful place in history as the first female preacher of the African-American Episcopal Church. One of her literary contributions to women in history was her journal of her

⁹⁵ Ibid., 196.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

religious experiences which she turned into a spiritual autobiography.⁹⁷ She identified slavery as a sin. And it was a sin that God would punish. This writer would also describe Rev. Lee as a prophet as she prophesied about a millennial apocalypse and made prophetic reference to Nat Turner, implicating an apocalypse at the end where two armies, a black army and a white army, will clash. She made this prophecy years before the Civil War.⁹⁸

The road to equality and inclusivity for women has been rocky, yet we continue to trudge along with determination. This journey through the history of the marginalization of women has been enlightening, rewarding, empowering and encouraging. This is an affirmation of the vision of the project, supporting the theory of the project.

Theory and praxis are complimentary to each other. It is the hope that this study will help to empower women as praxis is applied.⁹⁹ The historical research testifies of God's love for all creation which certainly includes the marginalized. God became flesh and was born into marginalization and oppression. His was a political fight against oppression and marginalization of the poor. He showed his disapproval of those who took advantage of widows and orphans. He denounced the corruption of a system that took advantage of the poor widow, a "system that made even those who had virtually nothing feel they had to contribute their last or risk being excluded from God's blessings, a system that was so focused on filling its own coffers and enriching those who

⁹⁷ "Religious Experience and Journal of Jarena Lee," accessed May 11, 2013, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part3/3h1638.html>.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Miller-McLemore and Brita L Gill-Austen, *Feminist & Womanist Theology: Pastoral Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999), 143.

administered that in the name of God it would leave widows destitute” (Mark 12:43-44). Jesus denounced the role of impoverishment of widows, showing it to be guilty of one of the worst sins in the Hebrew Bible, mistreatment of the needy widow – also one of the very sins Jeremiah said would result in the Temple’s destruction (Jer 7:6)¹⁰⁰ It is time for the church to establish ministries that support the ministry of Jesus which address ways in which to alleviate in the suffering of the poor and oppressed.

Theological Foundation

Beginning with the Fall of Man, humanity has exhibited the tendency to inflict pain and suffering on each other. The Genesis 4 account records the first human act of violence in the story of Cain and Abel, where Cain slew Abel in a fit of jealousy and rage, which was brought on by feelings of dejection because God was more pleased with Abel’s sacrifice.

Subsequent to the *Fall*, women became the victims of subjugation and marginalization as there have been implications that women are blamed for the sin of coercing Adam to disobey God; thus sin entered the world. Consequently, this sentiment has remained constant throughout the Judeo Christian world in addition to other cultures who share the same sentiment. Of course, many who oppress women do not found their actions in the bible, but seem to continue the trend of undue oppressive mistreatment of women, merely following the trend that began in biblical history viewing the woman as the weaker sex. The imbalance of power and economic status continues, and the scales of justice and equality continues to be tipped against women up to the modern era.

¹⁰⁰ Hendricks, 121.

The theological foundation for the problem in reference to this project is that of marginalization and oppression of women through the silencing of their voices as part of a continued practice of subjugation. The noted contextual setting is in a predominantly black neighborhood. This unit will examine perspectives of Black Theology, and Womanist and Feminist Theology. One of the common causes for the suffering of women is oppression. From a practical point of view, the theological foundation for this ministry is three-fold: the relief of suffering, administering pastoral care and beginning of a restoration to wholeness.

The story of Naomi and Ruth was selected as the Old Testament foundational text because of the underlying theme of support in a story of women coming together in a relationship of love and committed to a journey of an uncertain future. Their story is reminiscent of the story that began between the researcher and her mother except the journey was never completed. The researcher's mother was not able to share the joy of going from emptiness to fullness, poverty to abundance, from an uncertain future to security. Naomi and Ruth were on a journey to face an unknown future which could have spelled tragedy. They bonded together in a spirit of support and trust to overcome serious obstacles. The story of Naomi and Ruth shares the fears and uncertainties of two women who were additionally faced with the threat of racism, as Ruth was a Moabite, whose race was ostracized. It is not uncommon to see widows and single mothers in our society struggling to survive, wondering how they will make ends meet for their household as there is no one left to depend on for support in uncertainty.

The Gospel of John (4:4-26; 28-30) presents the story of the mixed-breed Samaritan woman, a woman of a hated race, whose source of oppression was multi-

dimensional. Her story, exposed by Jesus himself, revealed a history of unhealthy relationships that appeared to be short-lived. This woman was isolated and ostracized by the community and spent her days with her head hung down, embarrassed by and no doubt suffering from low self-esteem because of her position in society. Thus, she faced the daily challenge of enduring a long hot walk in the heat of the day to fulfill her daily need for fresh water. It is interesting to note that the “well” belonged to her ancestor, Jacob; yet, still she was forced to walk alone in order to avoid humiliation and rejection. Embedded in the story of the Samaritan woman is the story of the researcher’s lived experience. Throughout childhood the researcher observed her mother’s existing in a marginalized state. At that it was not well enough understood to label the conditions in which she grew up. She did not have spiritual insight or basic understanding to know what led to her mother’s display of low self-esteem and lack of self-worth, which led her to isolate herself from people of “social worth.” Her mother, for the most part, avoided crowds and social gatherings as she felt she would be rejected because of who she was - a single mother of eight children, struggling in an impoverished state to care for her children and a live-in boyfriend who made no contribution to the household. She often heard her mother use the phrase, “shamed to go around ‘big shot’ people.” Some of the researcher’s siblings had to live with “relatives” because of overcrowded living conditions in the small home. As did the Samaritan woman daily enduring the hot sun, the researcher and her siblings toiled in the hot fields, picking cotton, pulling corn, fetching water and whatever necessary tasks for the sake of survival.

This project begins the attempt to bring enlightenment and understanding through possibly hearing the story or one related to the story of the researcher’s mother. Sharing

of stories began with the oral tradition of passing down stories from memory before the bible was written. However, voices of women have been minimized throughout biblical history as many of their stories have been presented from a male perspective. Yet, women have made significant contributions throughout human history. God saw fit to use woman as the “life giver” of all humankind, as they are the vessels by which humanity is brought into the world. Therefore, the voices of women must be heard by sharing of stories of defeat as well as of victories and triumph. Sharing tends to give birth to spiritual truths which can lead to triumphs over hardships and trials. This project will seek in the end to set participants’ feet on a path leading to restoration of wholeness.

Toward a Definition

Theology is the study and understanding of God according to one’s faith. God’s plan and purpose for humankind is revealed in God’s most trusted documented source, the bible, which is the source from which this theological foundation is inspired. Theological implications of this paper holds that all humanity is created equal and hold worth in the eyes of God, and no one person is subordinate to another. Close examination and research of the language of the bible can be enlightening and reveals the patristic bias of the major themes chosen to be expounded upon. While men’s stories have much space, very little is given to the women’s lives, which are illuminated when closely observed. The Spirit of God moved on the writers as they wrote, but it is apparent that many truths were told from a male perspective and thus don’t always speak to women who look to the bible for solace and understanding.

The focus of the Prophetic Preaching and Praxis group relates to all aspects of prophetic preaching and praxis with a particular emphasis on addressing the relationship between hermeneutics and Practical Theology. The peer group based its understanding that “praxis” is central to the proclamation and its manifestation of God’s justice in the context of the local church as well as the community at large. It is a metaphor for the church’s engagement in the world beyond its walls, the civic society where decisions affecting our common lives are made through government, culture, business, entertainment, etc. The biblical theme is based on the prophetic word of the eighth-century prophets. Based on the biblical theme, this focus group defines the call to advocacy of social justice with practical application in a spiritual environment. From a biblical standpoint, social justice is purposed by God as God raised up prophets to remind the “church” (Israel) that God is a God of love, mercy and justice for God’s people. Amos reminded the people that God wanted justice and righteousness. “Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24, NIV). Micah spoke of the requirements of God’s people: “He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8, NIV). Lois Wilson, co-director of the Ecumenical Forum of Canada, explained it this way: “The glory of the Old Testament prophets was their insistence on the moral and imperative of God: that authentic human community is based on *just* relationships. And without doubt, this will require structural changes in the way we do things – especially at the economic, social and political levels.”¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Lois Wilson, *Choosing to be God's Change Agents* (EBSCO Host 1984), 311, p.146.

James Cone describes God as the “God of the oppressed, involved in their history, liberating them from human bondage.”¹⁰² Therefore, it is prudent to examine the attempts to silence the voices of women throughout biblical history and into postmodernity through the lens of liberation theology. History reveals that black women are victims of multi-dimensional oppression: race, sex and class. Cone examines a key concept of the bible that relates to liberation theology. Israelite history shows that God is concerned about the oppressed within the community of Israel.¹⁰³ Unfortunately gender-oppression of women is still widespread in the community of the church. In this context, the issue is not so much black liberation theology but spiritual liberation of which leaders of the church community are the perpetrators of oppression. God is not only the God of the oppressed, but God is the God of the oppressor, and the leaders of the spiritual community need to be freed from the bondage of being the oppressor. One cannot set the captives free until they are free. The voice of the women must be freed from bondage in order to be heard; thus the healing process begins.

The positive aspect of sharing stories from the past is the opportunity to hear the voices from the past. In order to embrace spiritual and emotional healing, it would seem that ministries for women who undergo social injustice would be more effective when presented in the setting of the church. Traci West, feminist theologian, argues that the voices from the past need to be passed on to the contemporary woman. The historical voices set the context for needed contemporary change.¹⁰⁴ Suppression of female voices

¹⁰² James Cone, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, NY: Orbis Book, 1986), 2.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Traci West, *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 22.1 (2006) 128-134.

in the church is a form of oppression and injustice. Oppression includes subjugation, abandonment and marginalization of women. As women share the stories of oppression it can begin the healing process as their experiences are heard through their own voice and not through a slanted view of a third party. No voice is as powerful as that of the woman preaching: “herstory.” Only a woman can unravel the purpose and authenticity of her story to speak into healing of another woman.

The dominant rule of the powers of principalities continue to wreak havoc on a society where grandmothers have to raise their grandchildren with limited resources. The parents to the children have either been incarcerated, murdered or impaired through drug addiction or other forms of incapacitation while grandparents are left to raise the children.

Bible stories reveal that God is the Liberator of the oppressed and Healer of those who are suffering. The church is God’s change agent that has been assigned as a vessel to help alleviate some of the suffering and oppression suffered in this culture of society. Suffering is a common theme for women throughout the bible, and yet they have altered the course of history with a significant impact on human history. Women continue to endure the pain of expulsion to a “wilderness experience” as a result of being abandoned with a child and limited resources as did the biblical character of Hagar. Hagar exemplifies abandonment and hopelessness having been victimized by a system of which she had no control. God intervened on two occasions. Hagar made an attempt to run away from the oppression suffered at the hands of her mistress, but God intervened and sent her back to her mistress. When the situation seemed hopeless, God visited Hagar in the earthly manifestation of an angel.¹⁰⁵ God assured her of a future with “descendants too

¹⁰⁵ Michael Coogan, 32.

numerous to count. After being forced from her home into the wilderness, God intervened again on the behalf of Hagar after she had no hope or means to provide for her son. God once again intervened and restored her to wholeness after promising to make a “great nation of him.”

Alternatively, women are sometimes victimized by perceived acts of “love,” bearing children only to be abandoned and expelled into a wilderness experience alone to provide for children with limited resources. The search for love often leads to dismissal by the father or the father being caught up in “baby mama drama.” Abandonment is not the only suffering women have had to endure. Women have had to endure rejection, ridicule and shame in their quest to overcome obstacles that threaten the routine of normalcy in their lives.

Many women experience the “marginalized” state similar to a Rahab’s lifestyle in order to provide for themselves and their families. When Rahab had resolved to live a marginalized life, away from the “good people” of the city, God sent two spies to her that resulted in her salvation and an ancestor in the lineage of Christ. The Syro-Phoenician sought Jesus for healing for her demon-possessed daughter. She was not a member of the “in-group” (Jesus and his disciples) and of a different race. She endured and overcame what seemed to be ridicule from the disciples and rejection from Jesus. Seeing Jesus gave her hope. She was willing to “eat of the crumbs for the dogs” for she was a mother on a mission of healing for her daughter. The Samaritan woman with “no name” was the victim of sexism, racism, and classism, but was used to evangelize a whole town. Through telling and reliving these stories, women continue to find hope. Some women

never experience the fulfillment of love and security of husband as head of the family. These women are resigned to single parenting and the role of sole provider.

Through telling and reliving the stories in seminary pastoral care classes with Dr. Emma Justes, the researcher's story began to unfold. The researcher slowly began to understand that behind her mother's tears, a story needed to be told. Hopefully her mother found healing on the other side as her voice was not heard on this side. The mother never told her story. The mother's story became the researcher's story for which the researcher hopes to bring closure through the voices of the women in the proposed project. Again, the emphasis for this project is not solely related to black women, but most of the theology is from the standpoint of an African-American perspective as the contextual setting is predominantly African-American. In the proposed ministry, the researcher will attempt to highlight the sufferings of the poor perpetrated by the evil of social injustice and oppression. Jesus describes such victims as he comes on the scene and states his ministry. The ministry is reflected in Luke 4:18,19 and Matthew 25:25-46. Luke 4:18, 19 clearly defines the ministry of Jesus. "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed" (NIV). The applied theology of this passage is further clarified in a conversation between Jesus and his disciples presented in Matthew 25:40: "For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me" (NIV). Jesus spoke on behalf of the least of these.

Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham supports the researcher's claims that the church is where spiritual and emotional healing should take place. Higginbotham looks at the role the black church should play in support of women. Her writings affirm the researcher's theory that the church is critical in providing pastoral care in ministries such as the one described in the project proposal. Higginbotham further argues for recognition as she highlights the importance of women in the black church and the impact they have had in the struggles for social and political justice for blacks overall. Somehow, the voices of these women have been minimized. Higginbotham goes on to explain in the following statement, "Church women contested racist ideology and institutions through demands for anti-lynching legislation and an end to segregation laws."¹⁰⁶ One questions the patriarchal leaders of the black church; historically, it is the black women who are the backbone of the very structures they lead. Their voices have been drowned out by the noise of male shouting from the pulpit for which many mistake for the "prophetic word." Black Baptist churches have most benefitted from the support of women but are noted among the last to "hear" the voice of women. Higginbotham acknowledges that black Baptist churchmen recognized the need and importance of women's support "for the denomination's efforts toward racial self-help and self-reliance, adding that male-biased traditions and rules of decorum sought to mute women's voices and accentuate their subordinate status vis-a-vis men."¹⁰⁷ Per Higginbotham, tainted by a larger value of the American society, the black church actually "sought to provide men with full manhood rights, while offering women a separate and unequal status."¹⁰⁸ The researcher has

¹⁰⁶ Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 3.

witnessed this throughout the history of attendance of church. How can this be? This is the church (black men's Israel), but they seem to be totally ignorant and deaf to the voices of the eighth-century prophets? Could this tendency originate from black men having been oppressed? Paulo Freire, in his publication, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, sheds some enlightenment on this problem. "The oppressors who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power or strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves."¹⁰⁹ Thus the oppressor needs to be liberated from the bondage of bias and prejudice. The voices of black leaders lose their impact and power in the quest to bring about social justice if they continue to oppress themselves. There is no authenticity in their fight for justice.

The yokes of oppression must be broken in order to move forward in the quest of healing for those who are victims of the "other side of sin." We start with reparations of doctrines which do not provide a doctrine for the sin of oppression. The researcher believes that leaders who practice oppression of sexism are also victims of the other side of sin as they are held captive to an alliance of institutional bondage, which continues in perpetuation of these oppressive acts. This is the type of injustice imposed on them as oppression from an evil system of slavery that took away their rights and integrity of a man. The result of this victimization is thus transferred to the weaker sex. There is a need for liberation for those who are held hostage to these practices. Freire sums it up in this way: The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, (New York, NY: The Continuum Publishing Co, 1993), chapter I. No page numbers given.

power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong enough to free both.¹¹⁰

Freire further shares why patriarchal church leaders tend to promote gender-bias and oppression. He suggests overall that the mechanics of oppression, as in slavery, dictates that oppressor and oppressed are bound inextricably to each other, and when the once-oppressed obtains freedom, he may take on the role of the oppressor.¹¹¹ This is a symptom that exhibits psychological similarities to that of Stockholm Syndrome, where the victims becomes attracted to the abuser.¹¹² Liberation in this sense is healing of the inner soul as we connect to the realm of that which is holy. There can be no freedom from oppression in the church until the oppressors are liberated.

Genesis 1:27 states that “God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.” Exegesis of this particular passage is actually stated that male and female are created in God’s image, leading the researcher to believe that male and female united in the Spirit completes the image of God as God is a Spirit. Man and woman were created equally because they bear the image of God. In order to understand this it has to be done by spiritual revelation. One needs to undergo a spiritual makeover to come to grips with this. The wheels of justice turn slowly, but surely turning. There is a long fight ahead within the race among black people about this subject and how to best respond to it.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Counsellingresource.com, accessed March, 25, 2014, <http://counsellingresource.com/lib/therapy/self-help/stockholm>.

We will also look at oppression via classism in which the “have nots” are oppressed and shunned by the “haves,” perpetrating oppression against those of what is deemed as women of “lower class.” When one thinks of the gathered body of believers called the church, one thinks of weekly or bi-weekly worship gatherings in which one repents and seeks forgiveness. The goal is to obtain justification and sanctification. In a commitment to address suffering among our impoverished community, the church has immorality related to its humanity and the evil that attacks those who are powerless to resist. To understand the pain and suffering of the victims of sin, one needs to do biblical, historical and theological studies to establish a foundation for a salvific plan for victims of sin. The hope is that through gaining a clearer understanding of the plight of the hopeless, the voiceless and the helpless, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will be more of a positive impact on the lives of those who have no voice in the continued fight for justice.

The theological implications of this ministry give a vision of where God is in the midst of suffering. Sharing Christ is a priority of the ministry as the love Christ is exemplified for the brokenhearted, the abused, the abandoned, the outcast, and the oppressed. Sharing stories can be liberating. In a conversation with a person who is an over-comer, she shared the words that “only another woman can understand the hurt and pain of a woman as she shared her feelings of abandonment when hearing the words spoken by her spouse as he voices he no longer loves or wants her.”¹¹³ To add to this, it is not uncommon to hear women in a relaxed setting share the stories of living in relationships where they are victims of “withholding of affection.” They go for months

¹¹³ Face to face conversation with a seminary trained female, who shared her feelings regarding the issues.

and years without having any type of intimate contact or affection from their husbands, partners, etc. They are bewildered, wondering why this is so, and many feel they are at fault. The alternative to that is to stay in a loveless relationship and endure domestic violence/battering or other forms of abuse, i.e., knowing your children are being molested by their father yet it is “overlooked.”

Linda Hollies, author of *Inner Healings for Broken Vessels*, reveals her personal story of incest by her father and a mother who overlooked it.¹¹⁴ Only the victim of such hideous acts can effectively share the hurt and pain and share with others the coping skills in which they dealt with it.

Even before the support group was formed as a ministry to women in the church, a group of close friends met on Friday nights on a weekly basis to share concerns and joys. At first, concerns regarding the meeting at each other’s home was raised as it had been said that meetings could only be held at church. Immediately it was realized that what was done outside the church in the privacy of one’s home was not a church issue. The decision was made among the women to minister to the needs of each other and that was not a violation of church policy. This group opened up with devotion. The time was spent sharing food and stories, which was very liberating and brought provided comfort for those who needed to confide. The group was made up of both married and single women. The single women were very candid in sharing the longing for a spouse and the loneliness associated with being a single parent, the feelings of abandonment. Some expressed the pain of never having known what it is like to legally “belong” to the man they loved, yet they bore their children. They were encouraged in their need to love and

¹¹⁴ Linda H. Hollies, *Jesus and Those Bodacious Women* (Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Press, 1998), ix.

belong, as to be married to the man they love is a part of God's plan for humanity. In this setting, trust was developed; thus, this home-based ministry lasted many years but began to dissipate because of various schedules and other obstacles. It's only a natural desire. The group disbanded after about five years of weekly meetings. Periodically, a member of the group will suggest the need for another meeting. In retrospect, this is another affirmation of the need for support groups that will allow women to share their struggles while encouraging each other. Women are nurturers and provide support for those who undergo and endure the searing pain of hearing the cries of hungry children as they seek to find resources which will meet their needs. They know something about the gut-wrenching pain of answering the door or phone in the middle of the night and being told that her son, who was only selling drugs to help make ends meet, has been killed in a drug deal gone badly.

The conversation with my seminary sisters further evolved in a revelation that this could be the reason God is calling so many women to ministry. Their stories are authentic and they have been empowered by the Holy Spirit to go forth with authority in order to "set the captives free." They are the vessels through which life begins, and they are the nurturers of those lives. Not only are women called to bring life into the world, they are very capable of providing nourishment for spiritual life. There is no denying that it is a part of God's divine plan.

The contextual setting of the church is conducive to women coming together in fellowship to encourage each other and share biblical stories of the love of Christ as he interacted with and embraced marginalized women. This type of ministry empowers those women who may have given up. The researcher can attest to this because she has

witnessed this type of victory among some of the women in the women's ministry at her church, of which she is the co-facilitator.

Jesus regularly engaged in conversations with women sharing stories which were enlightening, leading to healing and restoration. Some examples are the conversation with the woman at the well (John 4:1-42), healing of the bent woman (Luke 13:10-17), the woman with the issue of blood (Luke 8:43-48), and the forgiveness of the adulteress (John 8:1-11). Jesus performed many miraculous acts, but his death on the cross is the epitome of why he came: to die for our sins. There is no greater love. This we all need to share.

Women who continue to live in loveless relationships, mainly because they endure unreciprocated love, are continuously sinned against. The term "sinned-against" was introduced by Drs. Andrew Parks and Susan L. Nelson, in the publication *The Other Side of Sin*, "as they described the pain of the victims of sin. Sexual abuse and domestic violence are common among women and children. Runaway children are often victims of domestic violence and sexual abuse. This problem is often overlooked or suppressed in the church.

Forgiveness is a common request for many people in interactions and transgressions against God and each other. However, most of us never think of those who are sinned against who have no voice in acquiring relief of the pain brought on by the perpetrator. Dr. Andrew Sung Park, theology professor at United Theological Seminary, as co-author with Susan Nelson, describe suffering from the perspective of the "sinned against," which is described as "han," giving insight on "experience of the powerless, the marginalized and the voiceless." Dr. Park further states that *han* is the "suffering of the

innocent who are caught in the wicked situation of helplessness. This is “a void of the soul that cannot be filled with a superficial patch.”¹¹⁵ Though sexual abuse is referenced, it is one of many types of wounds that may be perpetrated against the helpless. While physical abuse is one of many painful acts of one human to another, there remains the invisible inner-woundedness of emotional and mental abuse and neglect suffered by those less powerful than the perpetrators who inflict this type of pain. Park notes that *han* is a victim’s deep wound that festers from within. It is the hopelessness and helplessness of the powerless, the marginalized and the voiceless in the world. Park makes the following claim: In our churches we see many victims of sin, victims of broken spirits, sexual abuse, racial and gender discrimination, as well as economic exploitation.¹¹⁶ Park and Nelson further states that *han* is also the silence of the wounded. “Sinners can repent of their sin. Victims cannot repent of their *han*. *Han* needs to be healed. They believe that the death of Christ on the cross represented the many “victims who suffer injustice, oppression, and the retributive interpretation of suffering,” symbolic of God’s *han*. The cross of Jesus advocates for victims of abuse, violence, unjust oppression, opposing abusive power.”¹¹⁷

A few years ago, while at a bazaar as a vendor, the researcher was approached by a woman who was a stranger to her. As the woman stood at the researcher’s booth, she began to play with the items for sale. The researcher knew that this woman was preoccupied with something other than purchase of items. She had a sad look on her face

¹¹⁵ Andrew Park and Susan B Nelson, ed., *The Other Side of Sin* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001), 46.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

as she slowly began to speak. She shared the story of her only daughter having been murdered by her husband who was a policeman. He had recently been acquitted of all of the charges. It had evoked a media frenzy which she had to endure and suffer through silently while enduring the pain of her daughter's death, learning how to cope with the injustice of the judicial system. The mother knew in her heart because of the circumstances surrounding the death of her only child that this man was guilty. Not only did she have to suffer the loss of her daughter at the hands of this man, but now she would have to suffer the knowledge that this man's freedom was a gross miscarriage of justice and she could do nothing about it. She stood there trembling, silently crying. She states she sensed this writer was a person connected with God. This writer could only offer her prayer, yet heard her cry for relief, and she readily accepted. She seemed to be relieved after she left my table. I don't know if the relief came from sharing her story or the prayer. This story best describes the *han*, which Dr. Andrew Park speaks about. The researcher recently recognized the woman as a first year seminary student at United Theological Seminary. The researcher wonders if she is still trying to make sense of the injustice in giving freedom to the man who murdered her daughter while she suffers the loss of her daughter. Is she seeking answers as the researcher herself is seeking answers to events of a lived experience?¹¹⁸

The researcher also associates the term *han* with the events surrounding the Trayvon Martin case, which tore at the hearts of many as Trayvon's killer walked free. Hidden from the public eye are the hearts of three "mothers" to Trayvon: the biological mother, the ex-wife and step mother to Trayvon and the present girlfriend to his father.

¹¹⁸ This is true story of an encounter with the woman described by the researcher. The researcher sees the woman regularly on campus and wonders whether to approach her, as she also wonders about her emotional state.

All of these women (mothers) had to undergo emotional trauma at the loss of the young man as well as live with his killer going free. One wonders at the emotional loss and rejection they may have suffered as Trayvon's father moved from relationship to relationship.¹¹⁹ *Han* describes ongoing pain they may have suffered as they listened to the "not-guilty" verdict, only to see the killer walk free. The researcher comforts herself with the description of *han* defined by Walter Bruggeman as "the shrill voice of the victim."¹²⁰ As the wheels of justice turn ever so slowly, it is possible that the shrill voices of Trayvon and the daughter of the "campus woman" will finally be heard from the grave.¹²¹

The church has been referred to as a "hospital for sinners." The sinners are seeking forgiveness of personal sins, but the pain and suffering of the sinned against often go unnoticed or even ignored. They may be able to acquire a temporary "fix" from the spoken words of hope. For the sinned against, the words of the preacher then become a new "Band-Aid" as they strive to be "made whole" and struggle to maintain hope for a seemingly hopeless situation. The sinned against deserve to hear the good news but "to demand repentance of sin from the abused, the hungry, the humiliated is not good news. It is absurd news."¹²² Christians come to church every week seeking to hear good news of the gospel, a "Balm in Gilead" to take them through another week. A preacher, who

¹¹⁹ This information was compiled from the extensive media surrounding the media and its coverage of the murder and the highly publicized trial.

¹²⁰ Park and Nelson, 13.

¹²¹ The term "campus woman" is assigned to the unidentified woman who is the mother of the murdered wife of a policeman.

¹²² Park and Nelson, 13.

knows the culture and personality of the congregation, may be able to apply temporary “ointment” to their wounds. Parks and Nelson appropriately sum it up. “In the pews, we find all kinds of people from various walks of life. There are sinners (liars, adulterers, molesters, abusers, rapists, and murderers), victims (the deceived, molested, abused, raped and bereft), and victims’ family members sitting and waiting for a message.”¹²³

The message of repentance should be more comprehensive for the sinned-against. There is a story within them that needs to be told in relation to what they are hearing from the pulpit in how they process what is being said in relation to their problem.

The researcher’s lived experience in pastoral care and background as a hospital chaplain is too familiar with this type of wounded being. These types of encounters in the emergency room of hospitals are common. The hospital is staffed with medical and social workers who are trained to detect this type of abuse. Unfortunately, in many churches, the saints have not been “equipped” to handle social issues of this magnitude as the pastor is only one person. The preacher carries out the work of delivering the word of repentance and “good news,” yet when the hymnals and bibles have been closed, the sinned-against are left to seek or create other means of survival as they deal with the ongoing pain and often undetected suffering. This is made manifest in the development of other unhealthy behavior. The victims may further complicate the issues of sin through violent retaliation in order to protect themselves from further harm. This has been played out repeatedly even in today’s church. Violence, such as murders in the church during church services, is not uncommon. In these instances, the preacher/pastor or other leaders

¹²³ Ibid, I.

of the congregation have sometimes been revealed as the perpetrators of sins against their members.

Most congregants are reluctant to get involved because of the “familial” setting of “church family.” They would rather not become involved because of the confidential nature of these issues. Far too often this has been the case with church leaders and it is too complicated to unravel, especially in those who have no professional training.

When people hear the word “oppression,” they often think of racial oppression; thus, it is often overlooked in churches. The unjust exercise of power should be addressed by the church in order to “set the captives free.” People often think of this term in the social, racial realms and the workplace, but it often goes unheeded in congregations.

A critical branch of theology which contributes to the ministerial process of this project is the theology of pastoral care. One definition of pastoral care is that where Christians offer help and caring to others in their church or wider community. It can be listening, supporting, encouraging and befriending.¹²⁴ In this sense, the church becomes an agent of ministry, which cares for the hurting and the poor. Three of the gospel writers give an account of Jesus’ response to the disciples’ complaints about “waste” as a woman poured an expensive alabaster cream on Jesus’ head, suggesting this could be used to help the poor (Matt: 26:8,9). “The poor you will always have with you...” (Matt. 26:11, Mk. 14:7 and John 12:8). This is a well-known and often quoted scripture used to justify the neglect of those who are in need. The gospel as recorded in Mark 14:7 records Jesus’ response to the disciples. “The poor you will always have with you; and you can help

¹²⁴ Christ Episcopal Church “Pastoral Care,” accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.cecsa.org/pastoral>.

them any time you want.” Based on the above gospel writings, it is the writer’s theological understanding that it is the responsibility of the church to care for the marginalized and hurting. The need is ongoing.

Edward P. Wimberly, author of *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling*, explores pastoral care counseling as a political process and reveals the need for pastoral care which would address the support groups and story-telling aspect of this project. He states, “We need an ethic of care that guides interpersonal relationships, fosters love, builds compassion, constructs systems of support, and denounces violence and abuse in all forms.”¹²⁵ Mentoring and support enable people to participate in the political process of self-governing and administration of issues of concern. Wimberley asserts that “self-governing and community building is not a privilege but a God-given right and “it is expected of God that all would exercise those rights though they may sometimes be denied. Pastoral counseling is a vehicle set in place to facilitate, enable, motivate and give courage to get involved through participation.”¹²⁶

Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Auster, womanist and feminist theologians, make the claim that responsibility for care of the citizens of the United States is becoming less and less. It is inevitable that congregations will have increased roles in caring for the marginalized and disadvantaged.¹²⁷ Moreover, the “haves” are becoming more vocal in denying the “have-nots.”

¹²⁵ Edward P. Wimberly, *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006), 20.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹²⁷ Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore and Brita L. Gill-Austern, 19.

Increasing numbers of lay (non-ordained) persons are entering seminary as they undergo the rigid training process whereby they answer the call to the ministry of “helps” in the answer to social injustice. Seminary training has given the researcher newer meaning to the process of “equipping the saints.” The researcher is adamant in her claim regarding her call to this type of ministry. The project addressed in this thesis is based on the call to minister to the marginalized. In this project, the marginalized are the women who need to share stories.

Dr. Robert Walker, lay-minister and mentor for doctor of ministry, group as well as Ministry Formation and Integration facilitator, introduced another form of healing leading to wholeness in one of his sermons: “He Won’t Leave Us Hanging.” He spoke to the social injustice perpetrated against the poor overall. He reminded the hearers that they live in God’s economy; everything they have was given to us by God, who made everything good. Thus, we are to care for God’s creation, beginning with self-care, which would include maintenance of body, mind and soul. As such we should be whole as we seek to minister to the needs of the poor.¹²⁸ Dr. Walker, activist for social justice and recently retired Director of Wesleyan Community Center after thirty-seven years, exemplifies praxis of prophetic preaching with his continued fight against social injustice through training others in the practical application of ministry for the disadvantaged. He talks the talk as well as walks the walk.

As the government is becoming less involved in the care of the people, the church, equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit, should be recognized as the most powerful entity available in alleviating pain and suffering. Women have made a

¹²⁸ Dr. Robert Walker, lay-minister, sermon: *He Won’t Leave Us Hanging*, ” October 30, 2013, Savannah, GA, Doctoral Peer Session.

tremendous impact in the history of the church in spite of the “muted” voices. It is imperative that the hushed voices of women finally become auditory. Their stories of suffering and triumphs have to be told. Their God-given gifts continue to be utilized but shining of their lights should not be hidden, lest they are denied the opportunity to light someone’s way. The theology of pastoral care is the “contributions of psychology and theology to building ethically, spiritually and psychologically mature congregations where healing and transformation happens.”¹²⁹ The church is the beacon of light and model of hope in a chaotic community of pain and suffering. Miller-McLemore and Gill-Austern believe that “interdisciplinary studies such as anthropology, sociology and ethics, aesthetics and educational theory” are integral and should be incorporated into pastoral care. The researcher believes that the church is the institution empowered by and used by God in the cry for social justice.¹³⁰

By networking and collaboration of the ministries of the church, the disadvantaged can be empowered to self-sustainability. The contextual setting of this project provides easy access for ministry to a community which has a high percentage of impoverished families. As such the church could be a powerful change agent in reducing poverty, rehabilitation and restoration of impoverished households through spiritual and social support. The researcher’s employment in this community of faith provided her with a deeper insight into the needs of the community, encountering weekly requests for financial and other resources for support. Vashti McKenzie’ suggests that there are larger structural injustices that “perpetuate poverty.”¹³¹ That structure was revealed to the

¹²⁹ Miller-McLemore and Brita L Gill-Austen, 19.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

writer of this project during a preaching workshop this past summer. A minister described it as “Pharaoh’s economy” or the “dominant system” of power which in themselves are inherently evil.¹³² It could further be described as a system of which the powers that rule continue to oppress by overtaxing, underpaying, while the resources for those at the bottom get to be less. Matthew 9:21 records a statement of faith from a woman who had been suffering from a debilitating illness for twelve years. “If I could just touch the hem of his garment...” She believed in the healing works of Jesus. Scripture reveals that Jesus used diverse methods to work many miracles when he walked the earth. These miracles were usually related to the contextual setting of the miracle Jesus performed. The community of faith is left to carry out the works of Jesus as we are the hands and feet. Jesus affirmed that as followers of him, greater works shall we do because he will go to the Father (John 14:12). As his children, greater is he that is in me, than us, that is in the world because his spirit dwells in us (1 John 4:4).

Marcia Y. Riggs, author of *Awake, Arise & Act*, proposed a system that began in the nineteenth century (black woman’s club movement) as a model for addressing the contemporary crisis in the black community. Modification of this system to include ministry to all ethnic, racial and socioeconomic groups would impact the issues of social injustice in our community. The focus of this movement served to come together in the struggle of liberation “from race, gender and class oppression in the United States,” with a “guiding principle of collective solidarity.”¹³³ Implementation of a model of the “black

¹³¹ Vashti McKenzie, *Not Without a Struggle* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2011), 120.

¹³² Joni Sancken, Assistant Homiletics Professor, “Class Lecture,” United Theological Seminary, August 15, 2013.

¹³³ Marcia Y. Riggs, *Awake, Arise, Act* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1994), 1.

woman's club movement would be helpful in combatting the moral issue of social stratification that was popular during the era of 1800-1920, encouraging the house slaves' perception of their social structure to that of being better than the field slaves.¹³⁴

In the contextual setting for the researcher's proposed project, there is no ministry yet established to address and maintain sustainability. There is a benevolent fund to help with emergency assistance which in a sense gives out "fish sandwiches," but there are no ongoing provisions that teach them how to "fish," which in turn, provides a system of sustainability.

A Summary

Humanity is resistant to change, especially radical changes. This was the challenge facing the women who struggled to implement social reforms in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They were met with stiff and sometimes violent resistance because these reforms were so radical in nature and the reformers themselves were women and were going against the image which society had for so long painted for women. Though the reformers were women, some adhered to the limitations of boundaries set for women, while others were bold enough to step outside the box and force the issue of the much-needed change. In spite of the struggle with subordination, oppression, opposition, and abuse, God has gifted women with vision, strength and determination to move forward and gain dignity and equality in society. Their stories have a profound and positive impact on restoration of women to wholeness. Prophetic preaching includes addressing the sin that permeates our society. In one of many essays,

¹³⁴ Ibid., 22.

included in the publication, *A Troubling in My Soul*, Jamie T. Phelps, OP, describes the two types of evil: natural evil, resulting from natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes; and moral evil, evil resulting from free will and human choice. Ontologically speaking, the root of marginalization and subordination of one human being from another stems from one of the two sources of evil: natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil is that which stems from natural catastrophes such as hurricanes, earthquakes, etc. Stemming from moral evil is “socially constructed evil.” Phelps explains that “socially constructed evil involves patterns of relationships that are directed toward the denial of the human dignity and dehumanization, and marginalization contradicts the reality that all human beings are made in the image and likeness of God and are called by God to eternal communion with the whole human community and the Triune God.”¹³⁵

In a speech in 1886, Anna Julia Cooper addressed the “colored clergy” of the Protestant Episcopal Church which gathered in Washington, DC, in a speech entitled “I Am My Sister’s Keeper!” We are our sister’s keeper in that we make available a safe and sacred environment in which they can speak their stories into healing. The church has been hesitant to provide ministries such as these as the leaders seem to be oblivious to such needs. They drown out the voices of the women in a din of busy activities that refuse to acknowledge the suffering of women by refusing to hear their voices from behind the “sacred pulpit.” The Southern Baptist Convention has begun to allow black and white women ordination. The National Baptist Convention (the longest Black American denomination), while giving lip service to the concept of autonomy in each

¹³⁵ Emilie M. Townes, *A Troubling in My Soul* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 48.

church, persists in the face of overwhelming pressure in resisting the ordination of women at national and local levels and is staunch in refusal to appoint a woman to any position of authority within the organization. It is obvious, that if the voices of the women were heard through such an influential conduit, the system of social justice will be revolutionized. The writer agrees with Anna Cooper in that we are our sisters' and brothers' keepers. The men and women need each other to work together on one accord in an effort to stand against the "evil rulers of darkness" which include all humanity. The emphasis is not in the importance of proclamation of the Word but on the presentation of the word through the Holy Spirit through which the oppression of women will be heard with authority. This is reflected in all ministers to be doers of God's word, placing emphasis on (praxis) practical application. Black churches have made strides in including women in the decision making process by empowering women in authoritative positions, but there is still much more to be done. We start with freeing women to function in the gift that God gives through the Holy Spirit, have equipped them with, whether administration, teaching, preaching, mentoring, etc. Some may question why the continued fight for utilization of spiritual gifts which empower women as they pursue professional ministry in the church. Sharing stories under the authority of the Holy Spirit empowers women to become change agents. Lois Wilson concludes that "much work needs to be done by churches in theology, areas of participation, and fresh relationships between women and men to enable and set women free to be used as agents to transform the world."¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Lois M. Wilson, *Choosing to be God's Change Agents: World Council of Churches*. EBSCO HOST.

The researcher sees it as a test of faith as well as a vehicle to continue to empower women as they share their stories.

Conclusion

In theory, this project would be effective within the St. Luke community, supported by Day's claims that "Persons within religious communities such as black churches must make this connection between economic disparity and moral values." She suggests that the black church can utilize a set of "moral values – compassion, social trust, social responsibility, participation and thriving," which effectively addresses poverty within our own community by forming ministries that would, instead of providing temporary fixes of "benevolence," train leadership that would expand through and beyond this community setting would reach into the mainstream of society "concerning the amelioration and eradication of poverty across racial groups."¹³⁷

Truth is I'm tired, options are few, I'm trying to pray, but where are you...I'm all church'd out, hurt and abused, I can't fake what's left to do. Truth is I'm weak, no strength to fight, no tears to cry, even if I tried, but still my soul refuses to die. One touch will change my life...Please take me to the King. Truth is it's time to stop playing these games. We need a word for the peoples' pain, so Lord, speak right now, let it fall like rain, we're desperate, we're chasing after you, no rules, no religion, I've made my decision to run to you, the Healer that I need...¹³⁸

The formation of groups of women sharing their stories provide the agency and the trusted community of faith in which sharing of stories would provide the potential for

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Tamela Mann, "Take Me to the King," accessed October 24, 2014, <http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/tamelamann/takemetotheking.html>.

empowering those who have been "beat down" or face everyday challenges of survival. Utilizing the resources of trained religious, social and professional leadership present in the St. Luke community, St. Luke has the potential of becoming a change agent that would build the bridges across the gaps between class and economic injustice in which the poor and marginalized can become contributing members of the community. Theoretically, this type of ministry has potential to turn stories into healing, wholeness and restoration.

Society is producing more and more people, who by adulthood have been wounded but have no trusted community to share in their struggles. Churches are the traditional outlets that people have looked to in the past; however, it would appear the churches, in many instances, don't have the resources.

Tamela puts music to the words that describe the pain and suffering women are still going through. Church attendance has resulted in her being "churched out" in her search for God, weary from the perceived "game playing." She earnestly seeks healing as she pleads for "raining down of a healing Word." Yet, she does not give up. She vows to quit the rules of religion and church and seek the real Healer. The church is the place God provides for us to run for healing; but sometimes amidst all the chaos and confusion we only find more pain. Sacred communities of trust and holy listening provide a venue for relief.

This project is developed around providing for the needs of those about whom Tamela Mann sings. When church has closed for the day or the week, there should be resources available for those who are seeking respite from their grief and suffering. This

writer believes there is a story in most people waiting to be shared which would improve conditions in the lives of both the sharer and those who need to hear.

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

Hypothesis.

The hypothesis of the research design is intended to reveal a culture of women who live “lives of quiet desperation”¹ with much to offer through awakening their prophetic voices. A twenty-seven-year history of active and intimate observation of the female population, the researcher has watched as women, gifted with prophetic voices and many other spiritual gifts, leave the church in search of ways to give voice to their gifts.² While every woman in this conservative congregation has no inclination to proclaim the word through pulpit ministry, they have been faced with personal, social and spiritual challenges for which they need an outlet. They welcome the warm and familial feelings of love and support from each other. The only outlet they have is through “counsel” of pastor. Personal experience through interactions with the researcher reveals that there is a need for sharing on a more intimate level, on which the person (female) does not feel comfortable sharing with the pastor. Some of the reasons have been stated as those of shame because of gender and lack of confidentiality. The goal of the researcher is to implement a model which would provide a safe and sacred place where

¹ The term “quiet desperation (attributed by Henry David Thoreau) was taken from a discussion between myself and Mentor, Dr. Kenneth Cummings, as I described the women in my context. Discussion: September 8, 2014.

² The researcher has personal knowledge of four women left the context and have become great preachers of the gospel during her tenure in the context.

the women have available the options of shared narrative. Some women may choose not to share, but hearing the shared narratives of the victories and triumphs of others in the groups could lead to empowerment in what they felt was a helpless and hopeless situation. Regular meetings of these women would provide an environment in which they can learn from each other through shared narratives, thus eliminating the shame and guilt of those women who feel their stories were too shameful to tell. This would help to rid them of the *han*, the wound of victims festering in their hearts for a long time, thus providing steps to healing and restoration.³

Intervention

The model of this project is that of the ministry of Jesus by following his examples of compassion, integrity and excellence. It will reflect the character of Christian community committed to providing support for women who face diverse challenges in their everyday lives. Research reveals that there are limited, if any, ministries of this type in the churches in this particular area. This area is populated with socially and spiritually challenged women in this community comprised of single heads of household, living in abject poverty, and other disadvantaged lifestyles. The desired goal is to bring these women together in a safe and trusted environment where they can share stories of defeat and triumph while supporting and encouraging each other. Prayerfully, this will allow the release of these emotional and spiritual burdens, which eventually equip them to serve others.

³ This definition was taken from a handout passed out by Dr. Andrew Parks, Theology Professor at United Theological Seminary, during the Doctor of Ministry Intensive in August 2014.

This group will be led by the researcher, who is a certified chaplain as well as a licensed social worker, and a professional counselor. The project is a feasibility study that will determine the church's specific involvement. Our intent is to lead, encourage, motivate, and empower women to be steadfast and committed to self-improvement. It involves exploration of the needs of women from all backgrounds. It will enable participants to experience spiritual empowerment through awareness and self-determination by understanding social and spiritual issues through mentoring, education and training. The targeted population will be women who live in the Northwest Dayton areas, who may be victims of generational poverty, abuse and other societal dysfunctions. Participants will be selected on personal approach and voluntary basis by inviting them to participate. The participants will be encouraged to work to improve their living conditions and appreciation of God's spiritual resources. Utilizing the qualitative research methodology, implementation of survey findings will be measured using pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

A discussion with one Professional Associate, Dr. Robert Jones,⁴ resulted in forming a research group with women who were not members of the contextual setting, but located in the immediate geographical area of the contextual setting. At the introductory meeting a licensed social worker became a part of the study group. This served a two-fold purpose: to participate in the study group while providing needed support of a social worker for referral purposes. Thus the study group consisted of two

⁴ Upon examining my abstract and proposal, my Professional Associate, Dr. Robert Jones, recommended some female acquaintances he knew. He felt that these women would benefit greatly from these sessions. Two of these persons actually participated. Two actually participated though all indicated a willingness to participate. One dropped out because she was not willing to share except in a one-on-one setting and the other one felt that she was not a good "fit" because of her criminal history and social background.

major players: licensed social worker for social support and a chaplain for spiritual support. The research consisted of six meetings (May to July 2014) over a twelve-week period with the last meeting being a seminar lasting three hours. Some questionnaires were completed using email. For the simple purpose of changing venue, three meetings were held off site of the contextual setting allowing for participation of women of diverse denominational background. The denominations included Church of God in Christ, Presbyterian and Apostolic.

Pre Test

A total of sixteen persons took the pre-test survey which was distributed to the women in the contextual setting (See Appendix B). They ranged in ages from twenty-one to seventy-three. Their social backgrounds were comprised of single, divorced, separated, widowed, separated or in long-term relationships. The educational backgrounds consisted of high school graduates/drop outs, currently enrolled in college and those with bachelor degree as well as master degree. Of note, one of the women had a doctorate. The socioeconomic backgrounds included women who held jobs in the professional fields, mid-level service or office work, retired and unemployed.

Of the sixteen women all felt that the church should be the organization where women should seek help in times of crises. Of the greatest Christian faith issues, four expressed concern in not being able to honor God's ministry through their prophetic voice; eleven felt there was gender inequality in the church; and two had no answer. There were a range of answers to question number two. These women believed that they should have a spirit of caring and wisdom to address the issues they face daily. Some of

the things they are in need of are empathy, nonjudgmental attitude, honesty, support and compassion, patience, listening skills, and that of being open minded. In answer to supportive services needed (question two in pretest), only two expressed the need for women supporting women; one preferred males, stating that men tend to see both sides of the issue. Seven women indicated a willingness to speak in support of a prayer group; three indicated it was contingent upon whether or not they trusted the group and one indicated no.

Post Test

The post testing (See Appendix C) revealed that all sixteen women believed the church should be the place women should turn in time of crisis. Five women indicated they did not have preference of gender for their counselors, though all sixteen felt that women were better nurturers. Three women actually indicated they preferred female counselors; five did not answer the question; one preferred males; and three stated gender does not matter. Thirteen women indicated questionable leadership as a cause for women to leave the church and three did not answer. Only two women indicated a willingness to host a support group and three noted a willingness to provide their homes as a meeting place, stating they felt restricted in the environment of the church. Finally, all sixteen women agreed that actively meeting in a Christian environment added to the quality and peace of one's life.

Research Design

United Theological Seminary's Doctor of Ministry Program utilizes an Action Research in Ministry (ARM) team as a collaborative approach to experiential learning.⁵ Using this model, the team consisted of six contextual associates, six professional associates, three faculty mentors, faculty associate and a peer associate.⁶ John Creswell gives the worldviews, strategies and the methods which contribute to the research designs. They are noted to be quantitative, qualitative or mixed.⁷ The design of choice for this project is the qualitative approach which includes the constructivist worldview, ethnographic design and observation of behavior.⁸ The intent of this qualitative research approach was to "understand a particular social situation, group and interaction."⁹

The purpose of the ethnography study was to investigate and discover whether creating a trusting environment would encourage women to share stories which would encourage and empower other women to take steps toward emotionally and spiritually healthier lives. The principle of action that guided the researcher's project was better described as the dialectical critique. The researcher found this to be more compatible with observation of behavior within a particular ethnic group of which the researcher is a product.¹⁰ The researcher actively participated in the study through active engagement

⁵ Doctor of Ministry Student Handbook, Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, August 2014, 18-19.

⁶ Ibid., 24.

⁷ John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd ed (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publishing, 2009), 16.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 194.

¹⁰ *Introduction to Action Research*, United Theological Seminary, Dr. J. Baston, Instructor, August 2012, Dr. J. Baston, Instructor, 12-14.

which gave a closer and more detailed observation of the individual as well as group reaction and behavior. As a participant, the researcher observed varied responses to the discussions and answers to the questions and surveys that had been distributed. Out of a group of twenty-eight participants, the researcher observed that it was those who were more committed to the traditional and conservative style of the context that seemed more accepting of the patristic environment and seemed satisfied to remain as such. It was the researcher's observation that commitment to tradition of the context proved to be the motivating factor rather than the need to be heard. From this point in the research study, the women will be generally defined as "the women's study group."

Measurement

The key foci of the measurement of this research design is the overall response and willingness of the women to participate and with a desire to continue in such a project. The researcher's desire was to develop an ongoing support group where the women expressed the desire to continue in this type of ministry.

Instrumentation

To ascertain whether or not women participated in regular church attendance, the researcher employed instrumentation of a pre-test survey (questionnaire) and a post-test survey (See Appendix B and C). These instruments were completed by each participant, and it was requested that they be returned to the researcher. It should be noted here that there was not 100% participation in completing the pre-test and post-text surveys. This further validated the claim that the project itself was not embraced by all participants

based on the mindset that had been predetermined by the traditional values of the ethnography.¹¹ Triangulation of the method was employed as the pre- and post-test surveys were completed; thus the researcher, through close observation and acute listening, was able to gain insight through the attitudes and behavioral patterns of the participants. Those persons who did not fill out the form were approached by the researcher for personal interviews which they rebuffed; yet, they were much more revealing when completing forms which allowed anonymity. The researcher noted uncertainty based on the culture as to whether or not they should complete the forms. It was concluded by the researcher that the study left a lot to be desired because of the inability to sample a larger group of women at the church. The reason behind this was because the leader of the context (pastor) was very hesitant to go forth with the study after he read the title of the project's focus group: "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis." He came near to terminating the project done in this contextual setting, sharing that he had a problem with the word "preaching" being used in a study group of women in his congregation. This gave further affirmation to the project's claim that women would benefit in a support group that would allow them to share women's concerns without the threat of the patriarchal component hovering over them, permitting freedom of expression.

Format of Group Testimonials

At each session, the researcher would present a discussion based on a biblical story related to women, especially in terms of oppression. Some of the women were very

¹¹ The researcher closely observed some of the women being evasive in the request to complete the surveys and questionnaires.

energetic in their thoughts and presentation. This part of the project was more informative with regards to the outcome of the study. Close observation of the surveys and questions appeared to be intimidating to some. They seem to trust open discussion over actual written materials. The attendance of the group has increased since the onset of the study with a clear indication of desired continuation.

CHAPTER FIVE

FIELD EXPERIENCE

The purpose of this field project came about as a result of the writer's own journey of discovery wedded with spirituality. As pointed out in the "Ministry Focus" unit, some sorrow was shared in how the writer chronicled aspects of her upbringing, especially as it relates to her mother. Later, her accumulated life's experiences, along with her seminary and Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) training, led her to the reality of the value of a safe place for women to gather to share their stories, many of which include horror, pain and shame. The writer's participation in the UTS's doctoral program "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis" further led her in the understanding of the prophet's role in not only speaking out against oppression and injustice but also pointing to the reality that God alone could give peace and solace. Against this backdrop, this ministry project unfolded that led to the present field experience. In honor of the writer's mother, this project was given the name: "MAE LOU'S PROJECT; GIVING VOICE TO THE PROPHETIC FEMALE SUFFERING IN SILENCE VIA SHARED NARRATIVES.

Dialogue with Pastor

Because of the nature of the journey in which the writer was about to embark, she spent a lot of time contemplating how she would chronicle this journey and how to inform the pastor of the decision. After reading the guidelines and policies of the doctoral program, she felt she would not have to inform him as he did not have a terminal

degree; therefore, he could not serve as a professional associate. After speaking to Dr. Walker, one of her mentors, she learned as the pastor, he would be one of the contextual associates. She pondered her options: two to be exact. They were to leave the church or quit the program. To be honest, her most serious options was to quit the program as she did not want to leave her home church. This was where it all began – her commitment to God. She was an active soloist in the choir and lead teacher for a thriving adult Sunday school class. Something inside of her kept urging her to go ahead with the program. It was none other than the Holy Spirit.

She held out until she was in her second semester and had to have his approval before she began her project. She finally took a deep breath and literally barged into his office one day. After greeting him, she sat down in a chair across from him, and with a rush of words, she told him that she had entered the doctoral program at United and that he would be one of her contextual associates. He began to stutter, while deeply peering into her eyes, stating that he didn't understand what she was talking about. She took a deep breath and stated: "I have entered the doctoral program at United Theological Seminary and you will be one of my contextual associates." After many broken and unfinished sentences, he seemed to finally understand what she was saying. He stared at his desk for what seemed to be an eternity and finally said: "Honey, why do you feel the need to do this? I thought you were through with that. What are you going to do with a doctor's degree?" She replied, "Well, you won't be doin' it, heah." She felt like she had been punched in the stomach but went on to further explain to him his role as contextual associate, and that she would do nothing unless he knew it and that she would share all of her documents with him. He seemed to relax somewhat but still had a disturbed look on

his face. The conversation ended and they exchanged pleasantries. He shared details about his educational journey, and she could sense he did not want her sharing it with the congregation. He called her in the office later and sort of chided her on how to respond in bible study as there were complaints from the members that she was “name dropping” and throwing her seminary training around.

As she moved farther in the program she began to share her writing assignments with him. One day she presented a document to him and he pushed it away stating he did not need to see that. No further conversation took place between them regarding the doctoral program. There was no public acknowledgement that she was enrolled in a doctoral program.

Stakeholders

The writer gives praise and honor to God for placing the following persons in her spiritual path; for without them, she would not be preparing to graduate from United Theological Seminary with a Doctor of Ministry degree. Dr. Emma Justes, professor of pastoral care, served as an advisor. She encouraged the writer throughout her master’s program and enthusiastically praised her when she heard that she had entered the doctoral program. Dr. Harold Hudson approached her the day she graduated with the Master of Divinity degree and encouraged her by informing her that age should not hinder her from continuing her graduate-level work. He too had obtained his doctorate at a later age. He placed the thought in her mind; and almost two years later, Dr. Rhansyl Harris inspired her to enroll.

Dr. Robert Walker closely observed and encouraged her when she wanted to give up. One day when she must have seemed particularly down, he passed her a note written on a fragmented piece of paper that simply stated: “God will make room for your gift.” He has been there all the time, and in her worst written documents, he continued to encourage her. Since he did not give up on her, she could not give up on herself.

Dr. Kenneth Cummings, who labored with her long hours on the phone in preparation of her document, brought clarity and organization to a disorganized document. He performed a doctoral writer’s miracle.

Myra Wilburn, contextual associate and wife of one of the associate ministers (Rev. Anthony Wilburn), has been there with her from the onset of the program. It was she who partnered with her in establishing the women’s ministry in their context. She was with her in at least four of the six meetings, encouraging her when she knew she was unsure of herself and withholding negative criticisms.

Dr. Robert E. Jones, professional associate, the rock, began the journey with the writer while she was in the master’s program. He gave her a contextual ministry assignment. Upon learning she was in the doctoral program seeking a place and people to carry out the research, he recommended female counseling clients and offered her a place to have the meetings. He provided transportation for those women who did not have transportation and even provided food on one occasion. He allowed the writer to work with him in work study at the Center for Urban Ministry at the Dayton View campus of UTS, giving her more experience and the opportunity to establish a women’s ministry there.

Edwina Blackwell Clark, former editor of Content for Cox Publishing, brought awareness to the need for congruency and continuity in the writer's documents and regularly checking on her to see how she was holding up.

Following the guidelines of Creswell's book, with the help of Dr. Emma Justes and Dr. Theresa Myadze – both professional associates – the writer chose the qualitative method, concentrating on an ethnography study using all African American women.¹

Project Timeline

The researcher began the project by meeting with professional associate, Dr. Theresa Myadze, on April 9, 2014, to develop pre-test questions. On May 15, 2014, she met with three of her contextual associates. Three were not available. Both male associates were not available. Contextual associate Willie Walker was never able to make the meetings. He agreed to come to the final session, but at the last minute he had to cancel due to an unexpected occurrence. Earlier on May 29, 2014, the researcher met with Dr. Robert Jones to develop a strategy. The meetings were held at his location for the first three meetings. The meetings dates were May 29, 2014, June 5, 2014, June 15, 2014, June 19, 2014, June 29, 2014 and the final meeting July 9, 2014. (Note the closeness in dates of June 15 and 19). On June 15, only one woman showed up.

Summary of Meetings

- First meeting – May 29, 2014: General discussion, getting to know each other. Consent and attendance forms were distributed.

¹ Creswell, 131.

- Second Meeting – June 5, 2014: Bible topic discussed: (Fourth chapter of the Gospel of John) and the Samaritan woman. An incident took place where one of the women felt that she was not on the same social level as the others there. The group tried to reassure her, but she never came back. The researcher was somewhat disturbed by her reaction as she was the most lively and talkative.
- Third meeting – June 15: The entire book of Ruth was discussed. There was only one present. She had her doctorate in ministry; her thesis topic was on the book of Ruth.
- Fourth meeting – June 19: The venue changed from college Hill Church to St. Luke Baptist Church. The topic of discussion was “The Bent Woman” found in Luke 13:10-17.
- Fifth Meeting was held on June 29: twenty-two women were present. The group did not do a bible discussion but expressed overall concerns. It was at this point that the post-test questionnaires were passed out. As noted before, all did not participate in completing the forms.
- Sixth meetings – July 9 2015: On this final meeting there was a daylong seminar/workshop. Food was prepared for all. Some had to cancel because of illness and unexpected events.

Contextual and Professional Associates

The context associates involved in this project were Myra Wilburn, Willie Walker, Minnie Bonner, Edwina Blackwell Clark, Rev. Sylvester Walker, and Yalonda Renee Newsome. More should have been involved, but the researcher did not want to jeopardize her standing with the pastor. She sensed that he would have showed concern if she approached too many women in the context, and some may have misunderstood what she was doing. The professional associates were Dr. Emma Justes, Dr. Theresa Myadze, Dr. Felecia LaBoy, and Dr. Robert Jones.

Seminars/Workshop

July 9, 2015 marked the date of the final meeting. An all-day seminar/workshop was held. A lot of planning went into the workshop such as securing the calendar date, which was no easy task as there still were some uncertainty that the event might not go forth. The congregation was in the midst of furious preparations for a two-fold celebration honoring the pastor for his forty-fifth pastoral anniversary in conjunction with his upcoming retirement, which was being held on the fifteenth of July. This particular date was available because an event honoring him took place the evening before the proposed seminar/workshop. Some felt it was only proper to restrict all activities that were not related to the celebration of the pastor. This has been an ongoing tradition of the congregation. In the planning of events, the church honors a “sixty-day calendar” and the rule is that anything that is not on that calendar could not go forth. It took some serious strategizing and manipulation of words to get it on the calendar. Most of all, it took serious dialogue with the Lord. The writer’s emotions were running wild. God’s word is true. God will give you peace in the midst of the storm.

The event was not publicized through the church bulletin neither was it placed on the digital bulletin board in the vestibule. The writer really did not want a lot of publicity surrounding the event, for she was not in the mood for explaining things which were not fruitful. She learned that once news began to circulate that the event was going to take place with her as the facilitator, there were underlying complaints that “Georgia always gets her way and breaks the rules.”

The week leading up to the event was spent in preparation. The writer did follow-up calling. All the details were carried out by her. During some of the follow-up calls,

some of the women offered to bring covered dishes. She thanked them and felt good about the workshop and preparing for the workshop. She had already invited the male context associate and tried to get her husband to be a participant so the male context associates would not feel outnumbered. However, her husband refused and at the last minute, the male context associate had an unexpected occurrence and could not attend. The writer provided food for this event. Members at large began to drift in and observe and share in the workshop and fellowship but had no input.

There were two groups for discussion. The topic of discussion was the Syrophoenician woman.

²¹Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. ²²Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." ²³But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." ²⁴He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." ²⁵But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." ²⁶He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." ²⁷She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." ²⁸Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly. (Matthew 15:21-28, NRSV).

The question raised by the facilitator to be discussed was: "How far would you go for the well-being of your child?" (See Appendix D). The discussions took place among the groups for about an hour and persons reconvened for meal and fellowship to further discuss the topic around the table. The prevailing sentiment was that this was an appropriate question, especially for single mothers who are not only responsible for maintaining the household and raising her children, but are also responsible for making sure their health is maintained. The women toiled over why Jesus would call the woman a dog or did he in fact call her a dog. A most profound theological revelation

came out of that discussion coupled with a previous discussion with Dr. Robert E. Jones, a professional associate. He was not present at the seminar. The sentiment of the facilitators and many others present was that most women would go to any length to assure to provide for their child's needs. It was suggested also that God planned this scene between the woman and Jesus. Her faith allowed her to challenge Jesus with the knowledge that Jesus did not, in fact, come only to the Jews but to everyone. It is faith that motivates people to persist and call on Jesus on his word. In the area of the personal context, it is all right to dig deeper in faith and question the leaders, based on the Word of God. Of note, this text had to be handled with care. If there were someone there who did not understand the theology of this text, one could see Jesus also as a racist and an oppressor by the language that he used: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24) and "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs" (Matthew 15:26).

The seminar went very well and some women asked to continue with this sort of study. They went away knowing that it is okay to be persistent with Jesus in their needs, especially single mothers who are raising children. The writer had indeed continued to meet with the women in the support/peer group at the church. Some of the women, whom she met in the first context, have maintained contact with her and have come to some of the meetings.

Other persons who had committed as presenters did not participate as presenters but were present because the writer knew that her work was scrutinized by the pastor and for fear that he would shut down the project in the middle of the workshop if he thought

that this was a backway entry to talk about women as preachers. Notwithstanding this threat, the day's activities unfolded but under a cloud.

Collection of Data

As pointed out earlier, post-test surveys were taken at the end of each session. The attendance varied at each meeting because of a number of factors, some of which were unknown to the researcher. The questions asked were:

1. Is the church the place to turn to in need of support during a crisis?
2. Do you prefer a male or female counselor?
3. Do you believe that the church should be the organization where women seek help in the time of crisis?
4. Do you believe that questionable leadership is one of the causes that women leave the church?
5. Would you be willing to host a support group?
6. Do you believe that actively meeting in Christian support groups with bible study and prayer adds to the quality and peace of one's life?
7. Based upon your participation in the support group, do you think it is of value to recommend to a relative or friend?
8. Would you be interested in being trained as a facilitator for a women's support group? (See Appendix C).

The woman in the group were leery of filling out these forms in that they had issues of privacy that they wanted guarded. Attempting to allay the fears of these women, the researcher asked them not to fill out their names and assured the women that the findings of these surveys would be used only as data for the doctoral project and the forms would be destroyed.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of the data collected revealed that many women were reluctant to share, even when given the option of anonymous survey or questionnaire. There were those women, from personal observation, who showed a reluctance to express their opinions to issues related to inequality of gender or male dominance related to the traditional patrimony of church and society. Some women did not complete the forms fearful of being associated with ministry. All believed they were able to relate to a minister. There will always be some who do not trust ministers though because of issues of privacy and discussing matters that are delicate. On a personal level, the researcher still has secrets in which she will not share. She even finds herself reluctant to release her thoughts about these issues in prayer; but again, she still has people she confides in about most of her struggles. Of the twelve women interviewed in one session, only four had ever sought out a support group to share. Support groups have to be confidential, safe and trusting. Again, one member did not come after the initial meeting as she only felt comfortable talking to one person and that person was her pastor. Another woman stopped coming because she felt intimidated by other women in the group whom she viewed of a higher social status.

Outcome

The outcome of this project was bitter sweet. It was sweet in that the researcher's self-esteem had been lifted because of so much encouragement from her husband, mentors and peers of the focus group along with faculty and staff of Untied Theological Seminary. From her early days in Alabama to the present, Georgia had come a long

ways. On the other hand, the outcome was bitter in that the context in which the project was held, a church dear to her, presented problems and obstacles. There was practically no support from the senior pastor who just assumed that the project was not needed. (He even questioned why the writer was in a doctoral program and assured her that she would never practice ministry in this church, not even as a director of Christian education). The researcher had to plan each step cautiously for fear of the project prematurely ending.

As for the data on question (2) of a female counselor, 85% of the respondents felt that they preferred a female counselor. Some of the comments stated were because of “sensitivity, privacy and the ability to empathize.” For question (3) on the church as a place for comfort in times of crises, 100% of the comments was that it should be; however, only 50% believed that it was so. This group believed that the church’s primary occupation was in asking for money almost to the extent of harassment. For question (5) that asked about hosting a support group, only three persons were open to this. Those who were not open to this cited that they did not feel they had the skills to facilitate this while six said that their home was inadequate to host such an event. Questions (6) asked whether a women’s group of prayer and bible study added to the quality of their faith and Christian walk. All of the respondents said that it did. Only two persons said that they had interest in being trained as a group leader. Ten persons indicated that they would be open to inviting a friend or relative to such a group.

The researcher took away from this, notwithstanding the obstacles of the context and the coyness of some of the participants, that there is a value in being a part of a small group, more specifically a women’s group. There are concerns that women face in relationship to their spouse, family and the market place. Women are not paid, for the

most part, comparable to men for the same work. Women have difficulty in moving up the ladder in employment with glass ceilings before them. Women are not given due consideration for being working mothers in all that this entails. Women sometimes face law enforcement that is dismissive of some of their claims of abuse. And women, who anchor most churches in all religious traditions with their presences, finances and labor, are often shut out of administrative and leadership positions. Then there is the matter of intimate relationship in which women are a part. Many of these relationships are fraught with abuse and violence. Many of these women have literally nowhere to turn. A small group ministry where women can study, pray and share their narratives are of value even though there are many obstacles in developing them, especially in many of the Baptist churches.

CHAPTER SIX

REFLECTIONS, SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research project was to develop a ministry model that would allow the voice of the female to be heard over the den of patriarchs which still prevail in some traditions. The project was done as a feasibility study using St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church in Dayton, Ohio, as a context. The study revealed that women of this context were met with the following challenges:

- a. Resistance of the pastoral leader to identify women as ministers.
- b. Barriers of pastoral leadership to women suffering in silence because their light is hidden under a bushel.
- c. For women to be in effective ministry in the church, pastoral leadership must be comfortable with women in ministry.
- d. Women in the church resist the term and minimize their God-given gifts because of misappropriation of information given to women; thus the women have a gender bias for male leadership.
- e. The need to explore the silence of women who want and need the perspective of female leadership.

In order for women to move forward in the works of the ministry while alleviating some of the suffering, traditions need to be relaxed and modified. The project itself was somewhat difficult to carry out because of the sensitive nature of the words used, reflecting the very views that the study was concerned with “women in ministry.” In

order for the project to get off the ground, the professional associate, Dr. Robert Jones, assisted the researcher in referring ongoing counseling clients to her, who were members of the church he was pastoring at that time. The process was then moved to the writer's context, combining these women with women of her context.

The researcher was restricted in her ability to use the bulletin for the purpose of publicizing the study. Since there was already a women's support group established, with some subtlety, the process was carried out. The researcher believes that because of the existing issues with women in ministry, she was not able to get a true sampling of the context. But this gave further affirmation to the need to develop a ministry model which would provide an environment where women could feel free to discuss their issues without fear of retribution. Theological implications in this model revealed that the central focus of Jesus and his ministry were to the oppressed (See Luke 4:18). A particular category of the oppressed was widows and orphans. The role of the church has the distinct role of ministry to women and children. There are women who feel more comfortable sharing their needs with female counselors. The church needs to reach out to women; however, it was revealed that women can be some of the biggest oppressors of women.

Yet, there are women who are gifted with special powerful abilities/gifts to be in service to the needs of women but are hiding their gifts because of the age-old gender bias which dates from the Fall of Adam and Eve until the very postmodern age.

In conclusion, terminology needs to change. There are many women suffering silence in the life of the church. There are those who equate and interpret the use of the word "ministry" as defining the position of males in the pulpit; as a result, there is a

contradiction of the word “ministry.” First, one must understand that service is a ministry. The word “ministry” should not be used to minimize the many different services that women provide in the church. Defining ministry as service, both in the church and the community, is paramount. The role of the Christian Education Department and how women are minimized in the work of Christian education should be further explored and implemented.

The researcher is not sure of her future in the ministry of her current context; however, she intends to carry out the ministry model of this research project. This model of ministry serves to support women through mentoring as they share, confide and reveal their concerns, whether it be gifts of ministry or incidents in everyday life. The purpose is to promote healing through restoration of wholeness.

Dr. Emma Justes, the pastoral counseling professor at United Theological Seminary, feels that secrets should be shared, even the most shameful secrets as shame holds the power to keep us from all God wants us to be. As speaker of United Theological Seminary’s 144th Opening Convocation at Christ United Methodist Church, Dr. Justes advised we can do a great deal more to diminish the pain and suffering through secrets we share. She encouraged the provisions of opening doors for ways to share with others as this can be useful for healing. There are benefits that might arise from sharing, possibly providing healing for internal spiritual dysfunction. Giving voice and opportunity to being heard goes a long way towards healing.¹

¹ Dr. Emma Justes, 144th Convocation “Address” at United Theological Seminary, Christ United Methodist Church, Kettering, OH, September 15, 2014.

The researcher's immediate attention will be given to establishing a women's center which would address a variety of women's needs, such as a counseling center for women who are suffering from PTSD, bible study, mentoring, computer training, employment assistance and other needs as they arise. The name of the center will be called "The Least of These."

A Concluding Note

This was a very satisfying experience and it was satisfying to observe the interaction of women and the looks of enlightenment as women shared conversation. On two occasions there were unpleasant moments for the researcher. Once during a meeting upon going around the table and making introductions, one of the women became very emotional because she felt she did not measure up to the social standards of the group. She never came back. The most painful time of this research occurred when the writer met with her mentor, Dr. Robert Walker and the pastor of the congregation when the pastor contemplated terminating the project in this context because association of the word "preaching" that was a part of the title "Prophetic Preaching and Praxis." Needless to say, this is a part of the process the writer never wants to encounter again.

If the occasion were to arise for this writer to carry out a similar project, she would not choose this setting. She believes there is a lot of ministry to be carried out by women in this contextual setting, but change in this difficult culture is a slow process. The writer was the biggest surprise of this whole research project. She has constantly questioned her own rationale for carrying out this project in such a difficult setting that is so resistant to change. Her faith was challenged many times, but faith is what enabled

her to keep pushing. She has no doubt that the ministry is needed. The women continue their monthly meeting ever third Tuesday evening as six o'clock p.m.

The Journey Up to This Point

This journey of doctoral studies has been, to say the least, rewarding, fulfilling and most importantly, transformative. The research material composed and the process which was used in this written document impacted lives. Of note, one encounter with a particular subject regarding the senseless murder of her only daughter has remained with this writer. This woman shared her story of pain and suffering (*han*). The perpetrator of this murderous act walked free of this murder, as mentioned in the body of the project.

This writer believes it was an act of God which brought them together as lunch partners in a recent meal setting at UTS. As the two of them sat together, this writer decided to identify herself as the woman who shared her pain and prayed with her at that sale event so many years ago. We locked eyes; she began to thank this writer as she did not recognize her earlier. Her eyes welled up with tears as she shared that this very painful event drove her to becoming an alcoholic as a means of coping with the loss of her daughter. She remembers frequenting liquor store with no liquor of choice, only concerned with the alcoholic components which served to numb her pain. Each week, she would gather empty bottles from her bedroom and put them into a plastic trash bag and dispose of them only to begin the process again the following week. The two of us talked at length but ended the conversation when the lunch ended. There remained a question in this writer's mind: How did she kick alcoholism? This writer studies her now at a distance, sensing she may not have complete closure to this incident. Most

people would not be able to bring complete closure to this type of pain and suffering. This writer can only conclude that each time she spoke, she heard and felt her pain but sensed that her speaking about it served as a means of comfort and relief. This type of meeting between women who are suffering bears witness to the validity of the project overall.

This writer is currently in the process of writing a proposal to start such a ministry that would serve women like her. She is currently working at the satellite office of United Theological Seminary in Urban Ministry as a work study student. With God's guidance a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization will be started giving birth to the ministry *The Least of These*.

Women are living in a world that is being tossed to and fro on a turbulent sea of chaos and sin. The babies are crying; the children are dying in the streets. Church leadership is losing its credibility. In his sermon, "Sleeping Through the Storm," Dr. Kenneth Cummings addressed the concerns of today's world and offered a challenge for the church. In summary, he pointed out how our people are sleeping in the pews in the midst of the storm. All hands are needed on deck with men and women working together to bring a word from the Lord. Leaders need to wake up, stand up and speak up.² By God's grace and by following the Spirit of the Lord, this writer, though coming to an end of an academic ministry journey, is just beginning a much needed ministry working with and alongside women (and committed men) in comforting, strengthening and empowering women to be all that God has called them to be.

² Kenneth W. Cummings, Sr., "Sleeping Through the Storm," Charleston Southern University, Charleston, SC, October 29, 2014.

APPENDIX A
CENSUS DATA

2010 Decennial Census Summary
Wesleyan Hill Neighborhood Planning District

POPULATION

HOUSING UNITS

	Total	Occupied	Vacant	Owner/Owned	Renter/Owned
2000	1797	1156	641	312	844
2010	1285	603	682	176	427

AGE

	0-17	18-34	35-42	55-64	65+
--	------	-------	-------	-------	-----

	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2000	1158	38	765	25	722	24	99	7	166	6
2010	489	32	393	25	363	24	155	10	142	9

RACE

Population of one race

	White	African American	Asian	American Indian or Alaska Native	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	Some other race	Two or more races	Hispanic or any race
2010	59	1439	2	0	0	7	35	13

APPENDIX B
PRE TEST SURVEY

Pre Test Survey

Based upon your life's experience and personal beliefs, please respond to the questions below.

1. Is the church the place to turn to in need of support during a crisis?
2. Do you prefer male or female counselors?
3. Do you think that the church should be the organization where women seek help in the time of crisis?
4. Do you think that questionable leadership is one of the causes that women leave the church?
5. Would you be willing to host a support group?
6. Do you believe that actively meeting in Christian support groups with bible study and prayer adds to the quality and peace of one's life?

APPENDIX C
POST TEST SURVEY

Post Test Survey

Based upon your experience with the group participation, please answer the following questions.

1. Is the church the place to turn to in need of support during a crisis?
2. Do you prefer male or female counselors?
3. Do you believe that questionable leadership is one of the causes that women leave the church?
4. Would you be willing to host a support group?
5. Do you believe that actively meeting in Christian support groups with bible study and prayer adds to the quality and peace of one's life?
6. Based upon your participation in the support group, do you think it is of value to recommend to a relative or friend?
7. Would you be interested in being trained as a facilitator for a women's support group?

APPENDIX D
SEMINAR

Seminar
July 9, 2014
Topic: The Syrophoenician Woman
Text: Matthew 15:21-28
Georgia Alexander, Facilitator

10:00 – 10:15	Gathering
10:15 – 10:30	Greetings by the facilitator
10:30 – 10:45	Devotion
Introduction of topic	Facilitator
11:00	Breakout of two discussion groups
12:30	Reconvening and discussion
1:00	Sharing of meal during discussion and feedback
1:30	Distribution of post-test and further discussion
2:15	Appreciation and closing prayer and dismissal

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Akilsh, Lailah Gifty. Goodreads.com Accessed July 22, 2013.
<http://www.goodreads.com>.
- Ammerman, Nancy T., et.al. *Studying Congregations*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1998.
- Baruch, Levine A. *Anchor Bible Number 1-20*, Vol. 44. New York, NY: Double Day, 2000.
- Baston, J. "Data Planning and Analysis." United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH: 2013.
- _____. "Quantitative and Qualitative Research: Data Planning and Analysis." Dayton, OH: United Theological Seminary, 2002.
- Bell, Rob and Don Golden. *Jesus Wants to Save Christians: Learning to Read a Dangerous Book*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2008.
- Benjamin, Don C. "Two Stories of Two Women: Rahab and Jael." in *The Bible Today*, July/August, Vol 51 2013: 212.
- Birch, Bruce C. *Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005.
- Bons-Storm, Reit and Pamela D. Couture. *The Incredible Woman: Listening to Women's Silences in Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.
- Borg, Marcus J. *Reading The Bible Again for the First Time*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2001.
- Branch, Robin Gallaher. *Jeroboam's Wife: The Enduring Contributions of the Old Testament's Least-Known Women*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2009.
- Brittany, Arthur and Mary Maynard. *Sexism, Racism Oppression*. New York, NY: Basil Blackwell, Inc., 1984.
- Brosner, Mary Pierce. *Women Writing for (a) Change*. Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2009.
- Brown, Patricia D. *How to Start and Sustain a Faith-Based Womens Spirituality Group*. Nashville TN: Abingdon Press, 2003.
- Butler, Trent C. *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991.

- Capua, Raymond. *The Life of Catherine of Siena*. Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1980.
- Chavasse, Claude. *The Bride of Christ*. London: Faber and Faber, LTD, 1940.
- Cheshire, Barbara. *The Best Dissertation is...a Finished Dissertation*. Portland, OR: National Book Co., 1993.
- Cloke, Lillian. *This Female Man of God: Women and Spiritual Power in the Patristic Age, AD 350-450*. New York, NY: Routledge, 1995.
- Cone, James H. and Gayraud Wilmore. *Black Theology: A Documentary History Volume One - 1966-1979*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.
- Coogan, Michael C. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, NRSV*. Oxford, NY: Oxford Press, 2010.
- _____. *The Old Testament: A Historical and Literary Introduction to the Hebrew Scriptures*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Coulter, Leah. *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Sexual Diversity: A Pastoral Theology for the Sinned Against: Adult Christian Women Sexually Abused*. New York, NY: Haworth Pastoral Press, 2001.
- Craddock, Fred B. *Preaching*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1990.
- Cranton, Patricia. *Professional Development as Transformative Learning: New Perspectives for Teachers of Adults*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996.
- Creswell, John W. *Research Design. Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approach*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009.
- Crumpton, Stephanie M. "No Safe Space." *Journal of the Interdenominational Theological Center* 32, no 1-2, Fall-Spring 2004-2005: 99-121.
- Culpepper, R. Alan. "Luke" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX,. Leander K. Keck, ed. Nashville, TN:: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Cummings, Sr., Kenneth W. *Amen to That*. Hephzibah, GA: Kenneth Cummings Ministries, 2011.
- _____. "Sleeping Through the Storm." Charleston Southern University. Charleston, SC. October 29, 2014.
- _____. *They Led with a Limp*. Frankfort, KY: Kenneth W. Cummings Ministries, 2008.
- Daly, Mary. *Beyond the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press Boston, 1973.
- Day, Kerry. *Unfinished Business*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012.

- de la Bedovere, Michael. *The Greatest Catherine: The Life of Catherine Benincasa*. Milwaukee, WI: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1947.
- Doyle, Leonard J. *St. Benedict: Rules for Monasteries*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1947.
- Ellis, Jr., Carl F. *The UMI Commentary: Precepts for Living*. Chicago, IL: Urban Ministries, 2006.
- Fahlbusch, Erwin and Geoffrey W. Bromiley. *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans and Brill, 2003.
- Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Co, 1970.
- Gilkes, Cheryl Townsend. *If It Wasn't For The Women*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001.
- Gonzales, Justo I. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of Reformation*. New York: Harper Collins, 1984.
- _____. *The Story of Christianity, Vol. 2, The Reformation to the Present Day*. New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1985.
- Gordon, Heath L. *Doing Church History*. Toronto: Clements Publishing, 2008.
- Grant, Jacquelyn. *White Women's Christ and Black Women's Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response*. Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989.
- Green, Joel B. "Jesus and a Daughter of Abraham (Luke 13:10-17): Test Case for a Lucan Perspective on Jesus's Miracles." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 51, 1989: 643-654.
- Gryson, Roger. *The Ministry of Women in the Early Church*. St. Paul, MN: North Central Publishing Co., 1976.
- Hendricks, Obery M. *Politics of Jesus*. New York, NY: Doubleday Broadway Publishers, 2006.
- Higgenbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.
- Hoeft, Jeanne M. Agency, *Culture and Human Personhood: Pastoral Theology and Intimate Partner Violence*. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2009.
- Hogeweide, Pam. *Unladylike: Resisting the Injustice of Women in the Church*. Folsom: Civitas Press, LLC, 2012.
- Hollies, Linda H. *Jesus and Those Bodacious Women*. Cleveland, OH: Cleveland Press, 1998.

- _____. *Womanistcare, How to Tend The Souls of Women*, Vol. 1. Joliet, IL: Woman To Woman Ministries, Inc., 1992.
- _____. *Inner Healings for Broken Vessels*. Nashville, TN: Woman to Woman Ministries, 1991.
- Inbody, Tyron. *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmann's Publishing Co, 2005.
- Jenson, Robert W. *Systematic Theology: The Triune God*, Vol. 1. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1997.
- _____. *Systematic Theology: The Works of God*, Volume 2. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 1999.
- Justes, Emma. *Hearing Beyond the Words*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2006.
- _____. *Please Don't Tell: What To Do With Secrets People Share*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2014.
- Kahf, Mohja. "Representation and Appropriation of the 'Muslim Woman' in the European Literary Imagination From Medieval to the Romantic Period." *The Muslim World*, 1999: 207.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. *Where Do we Go From Here? Chaos or Community*. New York, NY: Harper and Row Publishing, 1967.
- Kroeger, Catherine Clark and Mary J. Evans, eds. *The IVP Women's Bible Commentary*. Downer's Grove, IL: Varsity Press, 2002.
- Lanker, Brian. *I Dream a World*. New York, NY: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, Inc., 1989.
- Lawrence, III, Melvin. *The Chrystology of John Chrysostom*. New York, NY: Mellon University Press, 1986.
- Lawson, Kevin E. "Evangelical Christian Education in the Early 20th Century: Marginalization and New Beginning." *Christian Education Journal: Series 3*, Vol.1, No. 1, 2003: 1-11.
- Lester, Meera. *The Everything Women of the Bible Book: From Eve to Mary Magdalene, a history of saints, queens, and matriarchs*. Avon, MA: Adams Media, 2007.
- Mann, Thomas. *The Oxford Guide to Library Research*. 3rd Edition. New York, NY: Oxford Press, 2005.
- Masenya, Madipoane. "Masenya Struggling With Poverty Emptiness: Rereading The Naomi-Ruth Story in African-South Africa." *Journal of Theology for South Africa* 120 (November, 2004): 46-59.
- McKenzie, Vashti. *Not Without a Struggle*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2011.

- Miles, Matthew B., A. Michael Huberman and Johnny Saldana. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Methods Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2013.
- Miller, Jean Baker. *Towards a New Psychology of Women*. Toronto: Beacon Press, 1976.
- Miller-McLemore, Bonnie J. and Brita L. Gill-Austern. *Feminist & Womanist: Pastoral Theology*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999.
- Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth. *Rediscovering Friendship: Awakening to the Promise and Power of Women's Friendships*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.
- Morton, Nelle. *The Journey Is Home*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1985.
- Newman, Barbara. *Sisters of Wisdom*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1987.
- O'Day, Gail R. "John." in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. IX. Leander K. Keck, ed. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1995.
- Oden, Amy, ed. *In Her Words: Women's Writings in the History of Christian Thought*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1994.
- Park, Andrew Sung and Susan Nelson. *The Other Side of Sin*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001.
- Park, Jerry Z. "To Whom Much Has Been Given...: Religious Capital and Community Voluntarism Among Churchgoing Protestants." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 39, no.1, 2000: 272-286.
- Perrin, J.M. *Catherine of Siena*. Westminster, NY: The Newman Press, 1964.
- Pohly, Kenneth. *Transforming the Rough Places: The Ministry of Supervision*, 2nd Edition. Franklin, TN: Providence House Publishers, 2001.
- Powell, Mark Allen. *What is Narrative Criticism?* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1990.
- Proctor, Samuel L. Dewitt. *Substance of Things Hoped For*. New York, NY: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1995.
- Riggs, Marcia. *Awake, Arise & Act*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 1994.
- _____. *Plenty Good Room*. Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.
- Skinner-Keller, Rosemary and Rosemary Radford Ruether. *Women and Religion in America: The Nineteenth Century*. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1986.
- Ruiz, Brenda Consuelo. "Pastoral Counseling of Women in Context of Intense Oppression." *The Journal of Pastoral Care*, 1994: 163-158.

- Sallberg, Kam Rose. *Their Stories, Our Stories: Women of the Bible*. New York, NY: Continuum, 1995.
- Scazzero, Geri and Peter Scazzero. *The Emotionally Healthy Woman*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010.
- Schwadel, Philip. "Individual, Congregational, and Denominational Effects on Church Members' Civic Participation." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 12, no.2, 2008: 159-171.
- Stanton, Theodore and Harriot Stanton Blatch. *Elizabeth Cady Stanton*. New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1969.
- Sturdy, John. *Numbers Commentary*. Cambridge, MA: University Printing House, 1976.
- Tamez, Elsa. "Hagar and Sarah in Galatians: A Case Study in Freedom." *Word & World*, 2000, Vol. XX, Number 3: 265-271.
- Tamez, Elsa and Sallie M. Cuffie. *Jesus and Courageous Women: Study Guide for Jesus and Courageous Women*. New York, NY: Global Ministries, 2001.
- Thomas, Owen and Ellen Wondra, ed. *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd Edition. Harrisburg, PA: Moorehouse Publishing, 2002.
- Tiffany, Frederick C. and Sharon Ringe. *Biblical Interpretation: A Roadmap*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996.
- Torgenson, Heidi. "The Healing of the Bent Woman: A Narrative Interpretation of Luke 12:10-17." *Currents in Theology and Mission* 32:3 (June 2005), 2005: 171-186.
- Townes, Emilie M. *A Troubling in My Soul*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.
- Triglio, Jr., John and Kenneth Brighena. *Women in the Bible for Dummies*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Publishing, Inc., 2005.
- Turabian, Kate L. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations*. 7th Edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2007.
- Ulrich, Ingeborg. *Hildegard of Binge, Mystic Healer, Company of the Angels*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990.
- Van Reken, Calvin P. "The Church's Role in Social Justice." *Calvin Theological Journal* 34, no.1, 1999: 198-202.
- Vickers, Jason E. *Minding the Good Ground: A Theology for Church Renewal*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.
- Vyhmeister, Nancy Jean. *Quality Research Papers: For Students and Religion and Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001.

- Watson, JoAnn Ford. *Sister to Sister: A Spiritual Formation for Women: Based on the Women of Scripture*. New York, NY: Vantage, Inc., 1998.
- Walker, Robert C., "He Won't Leave Us Hanging." Greater Gaines African Methodist Episcopal Church. Savannah, GA. October 30, 2014.
- Weinstein, Brian. "Naomi's Mission: A Commentary on the Book of Ruth." *Jewish Bible Quarterly* - Volume 32, 2004.
- West, Traci. "Must I Be Womanist?" *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, 2006: 128-134.
- Wilson, Lois M. "Choosing to be God's Change Agent." *International Review of Mission*, 1984: 310-316.
- Williams, Delores. *Sisterhood in the Wilderness: The Challenges of the Womanist God Talk*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993.
- Wimberly, Edward P. *African American Pastoral Care and Counseling: The Politics of Oppression and Empowerment*. Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2006.